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THE MONEY-LENDER.

CHAPTER I.

Antonio and old Shylock, both stand forth!

SHAKSPEARE.

EVERY social epoch has its distinctive vices, as epidemics prevail at different seasons, and in sundry localities. As surely as the canals of Batavia, the jungles of Sierra-Leone, or the Campagna of Rome, generate malaria and disease, is the infancy of a nation, "ere human statutes purge the general weal," distorted by the convulsions of bloodshed and rapine; while in the national corruption succeeding the over-ripeness of civilization, are engendered the colder-blooded crimes of treachery and fraud. According to a genealogical tree, not recorded in the Herald's Office, the prodigal and the wanton are parents of the swindler,—the forger,—the usurer.—Though the knife of the guillotine and bolt of the gallows be of iron, the mainspring influencing their action is formed of a more precious metal.—The root of the evil is—Gold!

The first fifteen years of the present century constituted a stirring epoch. The swell of the waters of strife had not subsided after the recent revolutionary storm; and the gallant vessels of the various states of Europe were still in peril of a shock. On all sides, resounded the "ha, ha!" of the trumpet, and neighing of the war-horse. A sword was in every hand, and angry passions contended in every breast.

At such periods, the minds of men wax fierce and reckless. The coveter of other men's goods hardens into the highway robber; the coveter of other men's lives, attacks by open violence rather than by poison or stealth: "I dare not," no longer "waits upon I would." The social body is in a state of terrible excitement.—Its very virtues are ferocious;—what can be expected of its vices?—

Yet the unnatural calm that succeeds to this enthusiasm of atrocity, an inglorious sloth of national soul and body arising from prolonged peace and prosperity, has results almost equally pernicious. As the glaring summer heats bring forth the noisome insect or fatal reptile race, a brood of despicable vices and grovelling crimes is hatched into existence by the sunshine of aimless prosperity. As in the becalming of the ocean, described by Coleridge, lo!

Slimy things do crawl with legs,
Upon the slimy sea;—

Even "creeping things" acquire force, when "innumerable;" and by the time the swords of legions of disbanded mercenaries have been converted into the implements of the housebreaker and the pickpocket, and the gold-shed of luxury has exercised as hardening an influence over the human heart as the bloodshed of a more turbulent period, we begin almost to regret the times when perpetual terror of body begat a more urgent terror of peril to the immortal soul.

While the ascendancy of Napoleon diffused throughout Europe a panic almost rivalling the Reign of Terror, the generous affections remained in play, to contravene the frenzy of national virulence and party hatred. Most people had some near and dear connection involved in the dangers of the war; and even the frivolous classes blushed to surrender themselves to the mere vanities of life, when the next courier might bring tidings of the sacrifice of thousands of human beings, or of the one individual dearer than all beside. The service of plate,—the gaudy equipage,—the diamond coronet,—lost a portion of their value. A death's-head was at every banquet,—a *memento mori* at every ball,—a premonitory knell in every ear!—

But the moment these anxieties abated, and

Grim-visaged war had smoothed his wrinkled front,

what tenfold requital did the worldlings yield themselves for previous self-denial!—What an uproar of rejoicing, what prodigality of pleasure, what cost, what splendour, what riot, what intemperance, celebrated the ratification of peace! England thought no further of her legions of dead, or millions wasted; and not content with hanging up her conquered banners in triumph, or chanting her *Te Deums* with grateful solemnity, suffered her anthems to be overpowered by a Bacchanalian roar, and the senseless giggle of fashionable levity.

Intoxicated by the brilliancy of a congress of kings in their capital, the English hurried to the continent to keep up the fever of excitement, and from that moment the manners of the day acquired a looser tone, a more epicurean luxury. London grew ashamed of its homeliness, and began to affect airs of *virtù* and graces of *savoir vivre*. New customs were introduced, and splendid enervation prevailed. To that epoch may be retraced the ruin of many a princely fortune. Not only were millions left behind by our migrant aristocracy in foreign capitals, or the gaming-tables of Paris, Spa, or Baden; but, on their return to England, their residences, whether in London or the provinces, afforded disgraceful evidence of the new disorder of things. Foreign servants abounded in every noble household; foreign tradesmen were established in every street. Everything worn, eaten, said, or done, was *à la* this, or *à la* that; and money rose proportionately in value, and timber fell. Unlike the ancient retainers or hereditary purveyors of graver times, these strangers came like locusts into the land, to plunder, devour, and take flight again; and thenceforward, multiplied advertisements of family estates to be sold, family mansions to be let and "MONEY TO BE ADVANCED TO NOBLE-

MEN OR GENTLEMEN" on the most disinterested terms, attested the progress we were making in national refinement.

Among the latter, and singularly familiar to the young spendthrifts of the universities and the guards, were the manifestoes of a certain A. O., to whom reference was to be made by letter, addressed to the Hungerford Coffee-house. There was a tone of respectability in the phrasing of these advertisements. They had the air of proceeding from some gentleman with a large floating capital, and no great faith in government securities, anxious to obtain good interest and a safe investment for his money;—perhaps for the benefit of a deserving wife and numerous family. People, reduced for the first time to the shame of borrowing, said to themselves, "A. O. is my man!" There was far less humiliation in addressing a letter to the Hungerford Coffee-house, than in being seen entering the doors of notorious money-brokers in Cork-street, or Pall-mall.

But it was observed that no man *after* a similar application, was ever known to refer his friend to the same source of relief. No one talked about A. O.,—no one admitted that he had any cognizance of this mysterious personage. Or if, in an orgie of thoughtless boys about to repair to the gaming-table, or confessing the ill-luck of the previous night and its results, some novice suggested the well advertised name of A. O., every one present appeared anxious to change the conversation. Each had instantly some pet usurer to recommend.

Still, not a soul was positively heard to say, "*Beware* of A. O.!" A charm seemed attached to the name,—so averse were even the most hardened thirsters after the pocket's blood, to pronounce its direful initials. However prompt to revile the originators of other advertisements of a similar description, as legitimate descendants of Barabbas, no one whispered a syllable against A. O. Discriminating persons may perhaps infer that most of these cautious friends were in his power!

At a dinner at the Guards' Club, in St. James's-street, early in the autumn of 1822, it was observed that discussions having arisen concerning recent losses at play, at Graham's renowned Temple of Chance, where, at that moment, fortunes were lost and won with fearful rapidity, the countenance of a young officer, who had hitherto listened to such allusions with perfect unconcern, became singularly agitated. It was noticed with the more surprise, because Basil Annesley never entered the doors of Graham's, and bore no relationship to any one of the parties whose affairs were thus freely canvassed.

"Four thousand on Thursday night, and three thousand last week!" observed Colonel Loftus.—"Poor Sir Grinsel! I'm afraid 'tis all up with him. He told me himself he had raised twelve thousand last month; and that he had not a resource left. Mortgaged to the last guinea,—every stick on his Irish estates gone!—Poor Sir Grinsel!"

"He has latterly had recourse to A. O.," added Captain Blencowe, in a grave under tone;—"so one can understand the sort of straits to which he must be reduced."

"A. O.!—Why, surely, *that* is the person to whom my uncle, the Duke of Rochester, is said to owe thirty thousand pounds?" cried a youngster who had lately joined, and was fond of citing his "uncle the duke," (a weakness of course hoaxed out of him before he had been six months in the regiment.)

"Ay, and out of whose clutches half the fellows you meet every day in St. James's-street would be right glad to extricate themselves," retorted Captain Blencowe. "A. O. is the last resource of ruined men;—the executioner who gives the *coup de grâce*."

"What the deuce do you mean by the *coup de grâce*?"—demanded the lad so proud of being nephew to a duke.

"The *coup de grâce* is the stroke given to a victim on the wheel, to put him out of his pain," replied a grey matter-of-fact old colonel, who officiated as dry-nurse to the subalterns.

"*I* meant that A. O. was the blackguard who aims the first blow at ruined men;—the sort of fellow to fling a stone at the drowning dog scarcely able to keep his head above water."

"It was he, I fancy, who arrested Eggerstone," observed Colonel Loftus.

"And it was a writ obtained by A. O. that drove Frederick Lumley to Brussels!" rejoined Captain Blencowe. "A man must, in short, have exhausted all other resources, to have recourse to him. However, it must be added that he is unfailing at a pinch. The brute is always flush of cash; and, if one chooses to rush into the jaws of a shark with one's eyes open, one is more to blame than the creature that follows its instincts by closing upon one. I once borrowed money of A. O. I had tried every other quarter. A minor with only personal security to offer, the case seemed hopeless. However, the cormorant was tempted by thirty per cent., and the attestation of my honest countenance and promissory note; and to my dying day, never shall I forget the joy with which I found myself redeemed from the thraldom of the debt, within the year, by the generosity of an old aunt, who was good enough to die for the purpose."

"Within a year what had you to fear from him?"

"Nothing to *fear*—much to *endure!*—I had made the interest of that accursed five hundred pounds payable monthly, out of the allowance which my skin-flint of a Scotch guardian doled out to me in like manner; and every third of the month was I visited by a hateful nightmare in the shape of A. O. I think I see the door of my room opening to admit him."

"But why not make it payable at your banker's, or agent's?"

"He conditioned that it should be paid from hand to hand. I suspect he chose to have an eye upon the morals and health of his debtor; for one day, when he made his appearance, as usual, and the effects of a gin punch party at Limmer's the previous night were only too visible in my face, I remember his fixing his keen eyes *into* me, like the talons of a bird of prey, and inquiring the nature of the disorder that made me so ghastly:—just as a ghoul might be supposed to investigate the state of the corpse upon which it was about to make its loathsome repast!"

"Fine him, fine him!—'Pon my soul, Blencowe, you are too bad!" cried several voices.

"You positively make me sick with your ghoul and your A. O.!" added the Duke of Rochester's nephew.

"He did *me!*" retorted the captain, earnestly; "the very recollection sickens me now. Loftus, the claret!—Something too much of this!"—and the wine was passed round, and the table soon resumed its tone of wonted hilarity.

All this time, Basil Annesley had been peeling his walnuts as assiduously as though they were destined for some fair neighbour at a dinner-party, instead of for his listless self. In point of fact, he knew not that he had so much as a walnut on his plate. Throughout the discussion he had been all ear; and chose an occupation enabling him to listen with his face depressed, to conceal his deep interest in the matter.

But the very means he took to disguise his emotion, caused it to be noticed. Basil Annesley was one of those open-spirited fellows who confront the observation of society with an ever frank and fearless countenance; and to find his forehead, usually held so high, thus pertinaciously incumbent, and his voice, usually so free in discussion, thus perseveringly silent, excited surmises in the mind of Loftus, who sat opposite to him, as well as in that of the grey-headed colonel.

"What is the meaning of all this? Has poor Annesley been playing?" was the secret conjecture of both. "Another victim to *écarté* or hazard! Another victim for the remorseless claws of A. O.!"

Yet Annesley had never been noticed to enter a gambling-house. The play of fashionable London was not then concentrated into so decided a focus as it has since become. But in a community so small as that to which Basil was attached, a man addicted to any grosser vice is soon convicted; and he had hitherto passed for a lady's man—an Almack's pet—rather than for a fellow likely to be carried away by the dissipations of *roué* life.

It was only a year since Basil Annesley joined the Guards. On quitting Harrow, he had completed his education at a foreign university; and soon afterwards, as the son of the late Sir Bernard Annesley, one of the bravest victims of the Peninsula war, had obtained a commission from the generous patronage of the royal commander-in-chief. Of the state of his fortunes little was authentically known. From the period of the general's death his mother had resided in retirement. No one knew whether she was rich or poor. Basil never mentioned her name. It was concluded that he spent the periods of his leave of absence from his regiment with Lady Annesley, but on his return he made no allusion to the visit. His habits of life induced the inference that his allowance was less than liberal; but though lively and open on indifferent subjects, Basil was too reserved concerning his family affairs, and too self-possessed in his good breeding, for his brother officers to hazard offending him by betraying impertinent curiosity.

Still, the grey-headed colonel, known in the regiment by the name

of Old Carrington and the character of an officious bore, meditated on the present occasion some investigation of the origin of the young ensign's embarrassment; when, just as he was turning towards him for a re-introduction of the subject of A. O., Basil Annesley, throwing his napkin on the back of his chair, rose and hurried out of the room.

Now Old Carrington was gouty, and the active movements of a lad of twenty soon distanced those of a man who to twenty added five-and-twenty years more, many of them years of active service; so that before the Waterloo Colonel was able to crook his finger round the button of his ensign, Basil had cast his eyes over the advertisements of the *Morning Post*, and ascertained, to a letter, the address of the money-lender to whom Wilberton's uncle, the Duke of Rochester, was said to owe thirty thousand pounds.

In another half-hour, he had not only reached his lodgings, but finished and sealed a letter to A. O. Instead of placing it on the chimney-piece, however, to attract the notice of his servant (as was his custom with those destined for the twopenny post), Basil Annesley not only left it upon the table, but placed the blotting-book in which he had been writing, over it, like a tombstone, as if —"look on't again he dare not!"

A letter entreating a personal interview with a money-lender!—an abject letter from *him*, the proud-spirited son of a proud-hearted mother! What would that mother think of him? could she suppose that, disregarding her solemn charges, her affectionate adjurations, he had, within so short a time of entering the army, involved himself in debt to a degree requiring the intervention of an usurer?

Poor Basil threw himself at full length on the sofa of his chamber, with his hands clasped over his head, and his eyes fixed vacantly upon a staring print of the Hetman's Daughter; which in a gaudy frame graced the opposite wall, as likenesses of Cerito or Rachel embellish the bachelor lodgings of the present day; revolving within himself, with desperate self-recrimination, all that had passed between him and Lady Annesley on the chapter of finance, at their last interview.

It was impossible to conceive a greater contrast, than between the noisy and public life he was leading in town, and the monotonous seclusion of Barlingham Grange. Situated within a mile of the New Forest, the ancient mansion inhabited by the widow of Sir Bernard Annesley resembled rather a moated farm-house than the cottages of gentility to which widows of moderate means are apt to retire to meet the exigencies of a small establishment. Concealed within the intricacies of a wooded country, attainable only by a detestable cross-road, or rather cross-lane cutting across the Forest from Lyndhurst, Barlingham Grange, or as it was abbreviated by the cottagers in the neighbourhood, The Grange, was excluded from all communication with the active world; and Lady Annesley was so cold in her deportment, and so wedded to the solitude in which she had resolutely ensconced herself, that, but for the affectionate fervour of Basil's nature, it must have appeared

a penance to him rather than a schoolboy's holiday, to journey twice a year from Harrow into Hampshire, and return thither for a couple of months, between the period of his quitting Heidelberg and entering the army.

Accustomed, however, to ascribe the melancholy reserve of his surviving parent to affliction for the loss of his father, Basil respected her austere melancholy; and though in his boyhood there had been moments when, weary of flinging stones into the old moat to startle the dab-chicks from the reeds, and of contemplating the dilapidated pointed gables of the old red-brick mansion, he had almost wished he might never again set eyes on Barlingham,—when he returned thither to be folded with momentary warmth to the heart of his grave mother, and submit anew to the cross-questioning of her venerable maid Dorcas, and the maundering of the old gardener (the only male domestic of that primitive establishment), he could not forbear feeling that, after all, home was home,—a mother, a mother; though the former exhibited the uttermost stagnation of earthly dulness, and the latter a reserve according better with the measured affections of more distant relationship.

But Lady Annesley was no longer young. Though still exhibiting traces of beauty of the highest order, she had long passed her fiftieth year; and those eager demonstrations of maternal affection which burst from the hearts of younger mothers, were not to be expected of a widowed matron, in whom a life of utter seclusion confirmed the tendencies which had led to its adoption. Nor was Basil an only child. She had a daughter, twelve years older than himself; a daughter who, having married young and settled in the North, was now the mother of a numerous family of her own; and as from the period of her marriage Lady Annesley and Mrs. Vernon had been never known to meet, it might be inferred that the maternal sensibilities of Sir Bernard's widow were of no very vivid nature. She had evidently never recovered the shock of his untimely death.

Still, in spite of appearances, Basil thought otherwise. Undemonstrative as she was, there were moments when he had detected his mother's eyes suffused with tears when fixed, as if furtively, upon his face. On one occasion, when she had taken leave of him with her usual serenity on his departure for Harrow, having been compelled to return a quarter of an hour afterwards in search of a letter addressed to Dr. Butler which he had left behind, he found her, on re-entering her cheerless sitting-room, with her face buried in the cushions of her sofa, sobbing as though her heart would break. Yet when aware of his presence, as if irritated that he should have been a witness of her grief, she only chided his carelessness, and did not renew her parting caress.

He could scarcely remember his sister. She had been brought up by her father's family. Basil was only seven years old at the period of her marriage; and whenever, in earlier life, he expressed to his mother a wish to see Helena again, Lady Annesley replied, "that they were not likely to meet, Mr. Vernon being an odd man;" an equivocal phrase, implying little or much, according

to the acceptation of the hearer. Basil had taken it for granted that his brother-in-law was a brute, who, on account of his sister's want of fortune, tyrannized over her, and kept her apart from her family. But as Mrs. Vernon, during their two or three interviews, had not deigned to bestow on him a single sisterly caress, he felt little indignation in her behalf; and had, in fact, almost ceased to recal to mind the existence of this estranged relative.

"It is really disgraceful that Helena should exhibit such unnatural indifference!" he once observed to his mother.

"The result of bringing up a child under another's roof. Barlingham was never her home, and she has forgotten that it is that of her mother and brother."

A hectic flush tinged Lady Annesley's pale cheek at the observation, and Basil instantly repented his words; for he had now begun to surmise that the solitude in which they lived, and the adoption of his elder sister by his uncle, had a common origin in the straitened means of his mother. It appeared strange, indeed, that Admiral Annesley should not have selected, as the object of his favour, the son rather than the daughter of his deceased brother. But this might be easily accounted for. At the period of Sir Bernard's death, Basil was of an age to require the affectionate services of a mother; while Helena was nearly sixteen, and her education completed. Moreover he flattered himself that Lady Annesley's partiality for her boy was not without its influence in the selection.

A portion of Basil's uncertainties concerning his mother, however, were now at an end. During his sojourn at Heidelberg, his developed intelligence enabled him to detect in her grave and earnest letters, a tone of maternal affection, subdued as by an effort of reason. And on his return from Germany, his demonstrations of grateful tenderness availed in some measure to thaw the icy self-restraint of the widow. If she did not treat him more fondly during the two months he spent at Barlingham, she treated him more openly. She avowed to him that she was not on friendly terms with his father's family,—not even on friendly terms with her daughter!

"It matters not with whom the fault," said she, in answer to Basil's interrogatories. "Suffice it that the Annesley family include the son so dear to me in their displeasure against myself; and are consequently little likely to make overtures of kindness towards you. Oblige me, therefore, dearest Basil, by abstaining from all further reference to the subject."

On another point she had been equally candid. She informed him that she was poor,—*very* poor; that her income of eight hundred a year, derived in a great measure from her pension as the widow of a general officer, would only enable her to make him an allowance of three;—that, the little she could lay aside, was forming into a fund for his future promotion; and that necessity, as well as choice, had induced her to convert her retreat into a hermitage.

"All my desire,—all my ambition,—dearest Basil," said she, "is your advancement in life. My fate has been a sad one. I was

wedded against my inclinations. Your father's family caballed against me while he lived, and cast me off at his death; yet circumstances forbad me to refuse their offer of adopting Helena; for whom, indeed—but no matter!——My happiness has been in *you*, Basil; my consolation in *you*. For *you* have I lived; for *you* I hope, and am happy. Deficient as you may have sometimes fancied me in tenderness, so dear have you ever been to me, that, had I lost you, I would not, I *could* not have survived. In your well-being, my existence is bound up. Become what I expect of you,—a man,—a man of honour,—a prudent man, endowed with the esteem of society, and my old age may still enjoy the peace and honour denied to my youth. But falter in the path,—disgrace yourself, and I become a widow indeed!"

A warm embrace sealed the compact between them, which Basil long promised himself to hold sacred; and again and again, previous to his embarkation in London life, had poor Lady Annesley dwelt solemnly upon the fact, that possessing only a life income, should he involve himself in debt, she would be unable to afford him relief.

"Think," she had said to him at parting, "think, dearest Basil, what would be the distress, the despair, of this tranquil little household, over which the quiet years have been rolling away unfelt, should any mischance befal you!—Govern your conduct, my dear son, by the conviction that disgrace to *you* would convey death to your mother!"—

And after all this, with the impression still strong on his mind of the noble dignity of that mild woman, and the strong motherly love mysteriously concealed under her solemn deportment, he had done evil,—he was in debt,—he had already referred himself for relief to the interposition of the Money-Lender!

CHAPTER II.

Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?
SHAKSPEARE.

LONG and tedious did the hours appear to Basil Annesley, which served on the morrow to convey his letter to the Hungerford Coffee-house, and bring back a reply from the individual so bitterly contemned by his club.

Three times in the course of the day did he return home to his lodgings, in hopes the post might have brought an answer, which, he trusted, would afford a first step of extrication from the difficulties in which he had involved himself. Still he was disappointed. On his table were divers notes and letters—some of invitation—some indited with the clerkly precision announcing, only too painfully to the conscious debtor, strong hints that his "earliest convenience" must convey a settlement to some expectant creditor.—But not a syllable from A. O.

In the evening, he had an engagement. One of his brother officers had exacted a promise that he would accompany him to a

private box at Covent Garden, as the escort of his mother and sisters; and, just as, full-dressed, but with his spirits in complete dishabille, he was quitting his lodgings to repair to Lady Maitland's box, the double rap of the last evening post caused the door of his small dwelling to vibrate, and Basil to recoil a step or two in the passage, while his servant brought in the shabby-looking missive, which was to convey tidings of life or death to the delinquent.

The interview was accorded. "The following day, at noon;"—the place, obscure and strange enough,—a street in St. Agnes le Clare, Old-street-road. Basil, however, was as much enchanted as though the rendezvous were assigned, by some delicate hand-writing, in the heart of May-fair; and he proceeded in towering spirits to keep his appointment with the Maitlands.

As he walked towards Arlington-street, where he was to join the party, there arose before his mind's eye a vision which, for some days past, he had sedulously banished; a vision of the low-browed sitting-room at the Grange, with its deeply embayed Elizabethan windows and spacious projecting chimney,—its antique furniture and grave aspect,—with the figure of his stern mother, in her customary weeds of solemn black, seated in her high-backed ebony chair, with her hands folded upon her knee; again disappointed of the letter from her son, which Dorcas had entered the room to inform her was not brought back by the little messenger despatched for the twentieth time to Lyndhurst, for the purpose of daily inquiry.

"If I can arrange matters, to-morrow, with this fellow," thought Basil, as he hastened lightsomely along, "I will write, to-morrow, to my poor mother. For the last three weeks, I have not dared take up my pen for any ordinary purpose of communication; lest all should end in my being forced to reveal to her the desperate situation in which I have placed myself. My poor mother! Even now I dare not think of her!—What treachery,—what infatuation! So self-denying as her life,—so watchful as her maternal vigilance has been—to be thus rewarded!—But if I can only prevail upon this damnable A. O. to accept the interest and personal security he took from Blencowe, I might, in the course of the next eighteen months, pay off both debt and interest, and dare once more to look her in the face!"

That night, on their return from the play, Lucy Maitland noticed to her sister and brother that she had never seen Mr. Annesley in such spirits.

"You have often told me your friend could be pleasant enough when he liked," said she, addressing John Maitland. "To-night, he was really most agreeable."

"Admit also that his gaiety was well-timed!" observed her elder sister. "Because Miss O'Neill had reduced the whole house to silence and tears, Mr. Annesley scarcely left us a minute's respite from his pleasant anecdotes."——

"Annesley had too much respect for the fashionability of *my* sisters, to fancy they went to the theatre for the sake of anything to be seen there," replied John Maitland, coolly. "He concluded, as I did, that your object was to enjoy our society, in a closer and

more incommodious place than your own drawing-room; and rewarded you for submitting to such very hard seats and so stifling an atmosphere, by talking all the nonsense in his power."

So little impression, meanwhile, had the amusements of the evening made upon Basil, that his first impulse, on returning home, was to take from his pocket the unsightly letter of A. O., in order to ascertain, with greater accuracy, the name of the street to which he was to repair on the morrow. He searched first in one waistcoat-pocket, then in the other, and finally in those of his coat and great-coat, and all with the same infructuous result! In his impatience, he flung down on the table his handkerchief and gloves, his opera-glass, and a small gold pencil-case he carried in his waistcoat-pocket. But this eagerness did not enable him to recover the lost treasure.—Not a vestige of his letter!

Though certain of having received it in the hall, and thrust it into his pocket preparatory to leaving the house, he now, in the perplexity of vexation, began to open his desk and dressing-box, in the hope of finding it there; though aware that he had not returned into his sitting-room after the arrival of the post. Still, the result was the same; and he was forced to end with the conclusion which had first presented itself, that his pocket had been picked in coming out of the theatre, and this document, valueless to any but himself, mistaken for higher game.

How irritating!—This trivial occurrence might be the means of deferring the promised interview for four-and-twenty hours! Nay, A. O. might, perhaps, fancy himself hoaxed by a second application; or, at all events, resent having his time thrown away by waiting at home for one who had no scruple in disappointing him; and refuse a second rendezvous. He had been told, only too often, that A. O. was not a person to be trifled with.

He began, accordingly, to ransack his brain for reminiscences of the address contained in the letter. St. Agnes le Clare, Old-street-road, he perfectly remembered; for there was a novelish sound in the first name, a something of Miss Owenson or Mrs. Opie,—singularly discordant with the second:—and, by a memoria-technical process, the impression remained with him. But what was the name of the street?—It was that of some noble family. It was not Howard, or Percy, or Paget. It was something connected with Wiltshire—he remembered it had brought Wiltshire into his mind. He would examine the Court Guide, and see whether any streets in the neighbourhood of Old-street-road appeared to bear reference to Wiltshire.

But alas! the Court Guide disdained all mention of St. Agnes le Clare.—The Court Guide rejected A. O. and all his parish; and poor Basil was launched once more upon his sea of troubles.

Of one thing he was certain. The interview was appointed at noon the following day; and the latest effort of his determination before he committed his head to a restless pillow, was to repair to Old-street-road, at an early hour next morning, and try whether, by exploring the neighbourhood, he might not accidentally touch the silent chord of memory.

It is not, however, a pleasant thing for a denizen of the West

End to arise from a warm bed at nine o'clock on a misty November morning, and after seeing the opposite shops opened by yawning shopboys, or damsels in curl-papers, and swallowing a hasty, comfortless breakfast, for which the baker had not brought the rolls, or the newspaper-boy the *Morning Post*, jumble off in a hackney-coach towards the far East; to be deposited, in a degree of bewilderment worthy of Robinson Crusoe, upon the pavement of Finsbury.

It was the first time Basil Annesley had visited that *terra incognita*. He had been quartered in the Tower, but knew nothing of the wilds of Moorgate; and, being far from a dressy man, and on the present occasion attired with especial plainness, could not conceive it possible that the stare bestowed upon him by the aborigines proceeded from the striking difference between the cut of his great-coat and that of the tailors of the Barbican. He fancied that the curiosity he excited must be of the same mysterious nature as that which fixed *his* eager gaze upon every corner of every street, in succession, in the hope of stumbling upon the auspicious dwelling-place of A. O.

It was now only ten o'clock; but in that commercial neighbourhood, the world was in full activity. People were going their ways and executing their business; as if it were a matter of no possible moment that the sun entertained no intention of looking down upon their proceedings. The shop-windows were dim with fog. The passers-by trudged along with their chilly hands thrust into their pockets, their eyes riveted on the cheerless pavement, their noses red with cold, and their faces screwed into a grimace. The streets were defiled by a thick coating of black greasy mud; and the skies and atmosphere seemed composed of a dilution of the same uninviting material.—Poor Basil's spirits were becoming depressed by the temperature of the day, and the complexion of the objects around him.

"I fancy I may as well give it up," muttered he, shrugging his shoulders, after peeping into a variety of streets, whose names brought back no token to his mind. "How I could be such an ass as to trifle with a document of so much importance, is inconceivable. Had it been one of Esther's letters, I should have hurried back to my room, and locked it in my desk before I went out."

At that moment, as he was raising his eyes to heaven in token of wonderment at his own inadvertency, they lighted upon a name at the turn of the next crossing, which brought an instantaneous flush of colour to his cheeks:—"PAULET STREET!"—Wiltshire for ever!—He had found it!—

But no! on examination, the thing was impossible. The street into which he now eagerly hastened his steps, could not be the abode of such a man as the renowned and redoubtable A. O. It was one of those wretched outlets abounding in the suburbs of London, of which the first house or two aspires to three stories, the following ones to two, while the others are of the anomalous kind whereof the roofs maintain a condescending level with the hats of passengers.

This long looked-for Paulet-street consisted of houses of regular

one-windowed frontage and miserable aspect;—the street-door nearly as large as the house, and the parlour-window closely adjoining it, and partially screened by a ragged and discoloured muslin blind, containing square patches of paper;—in some instances announcing "Lodgings for single men;"—in others, "Manglin' done here;"—or, "Wanted a child to dry nurse,"—or, "Lighorn bonets cleaned inquire wethin."

In more than one window stood a dead geranium, with its earthen pot standing in a cracked plate, which the hard-working inmate of the house had found no leisure to notice or remove; in one, a bird-cage, not remorselessly exposed, however, to the inclemency of the day, for it contained no bird. The canary, its former inmate, had long been starved to death; and the cage was placed on the window-ledge to be out of the way.

In such a neighbourhood, woman appears to be a more than usually fruitful vine.—Children abound in the street, perhaps because, like the bird-cage, put out of doors to make room within; and on many a door-step sat the dirty ragged sister of twelve years old, officiating as nurse to the dirty ragged infant of twelve months, whom she fondled, rather with the hope of deriving warmth for herself, than of conferring it on the squalling child.

Basil Annesley turned discomfited away. But that he still believed Paulet-street to be the place, he would not have abided a moment in a spot so uninviting. In such a street, the cheer of a passing equipage is unknown; even carts appear to shun its broken pavement. The barrow of the cat's-meat man or knife-grinder supplies the only rumble of wheels familiar to those miserable flags. A butcher's boy with a tray, or a milk-woman with her pails, would be a pleasant incident as inferring that the inhabitants had their turn of food and comfort. But alas! as if *their* time were not more valuable than that of the rich and idle, *they* are compelled to go in search of those common articles of sustenance, duly brought to the area-gates of wealthy men. Even the more considerable streets adjoining Paulet-street, not wider indeed, but darker and dingier from the greater altitude of the houses, exhibited samples of trade indicative of the outscourings of civilization;—the old clothes' emporium of Nathan the Jew; the shop of the dealer in marine stores, with its rusty iron and "broken flint-glass," its wax-ends, and other incongruous perquisites, pickings, and stealings;—the piece-shop, with its harlequinade of shreds and patches, and its black-doll suspended from a string before the door, bobbing grotesque curtseys in the wind;—the chandler's, with its wicker-basket of stale eggs, its snuff, tobacco, brown sugar and rushlights, commingled in unsavoury contact;—or the huckster's, with its frost-bitten turnip-tops, and sacks of potatoes,—that manna of modern starvation, exemplifying to the pauper-population of our times the virtue of the text, that "man shall not live by bread alone."

"I might have spared myself this fool's errand," murmured Basil to himself as, within a door or two of the junction of Paulet-street with one displaying these grander adjuncts, he passed before the cracked door-step of a house, dirtier and more disconsolate-looking,

though larger than its neighbours; and so deficient either of ragged muslin curtain, or notice of "manglin'," or "cleanin',"—broken flower-pot, or empty bird-cage,—that it had the air of being uninhabited. The mists upon its filthy windows superseded all necessity for curtains, if, indeed, aught within were calculated to attract the curious eye.

Just, however, as Basil threw a hasty glance upon the streaky pea-green door of No. 11, Paulet-street, it revolved slowly upon its hinges; and lo! there issued forth an old man, spare and stooping, who, but for his decrepid gait, had probably been above the middle size. His hat was napless, his brown great-coat threadbare; and the worsted gloves drawn over his bony hands so coarse and cumbrous, that, after fumbling for some time with his key in locking the house-door after him, he dropped it on the step instead of conveying it into his pocket.—His fingers were probably benumbed with cold.

The key fell almost at the feet of Basil; who, perceiving that the poor old man was making sundry efforts to recover it, good-naturedly stooped and placed it in his hand. Unused probably to acts of courtesy, the old fellow made almost as hard an effort to look up into Basil's face with thanks, as he had previously done to reach forth his hand towards his key; and when the eyes of young Annesley and those of the squalid stranger met, the impression appeared to be mutually startling. For a moment they stood, their looks steadily fixed upon each other, as though—

> They shared between themselves some separate fate,
> Whose darkness none beside might penetrate.

Even when a few mumbled words of thankfulness on one part, and civility on the other, had passed between them, and they went their several ways, Basil, on turning back for a last view of the strange proprietor of that den of desolation, found that *he*, too, had paused by the way, and was gazing back wistfully upon himself.

It was a relief to return once more to the haunts of a gayer world. Never before had Bond-street appeared so brilliant to Annesley, as when, having alighted in Oxford-street from his hackney-coach, he hurried back on foot to his lodgings. The prosperous, thriving, well-dressed population of the West End seemed to comfort his eyes. At Basil's age, it is natural to turn with joy from the spectacle of Lazarus with his sores, to the auspicious prosperity of the man clothed in purple and fine linen.

"No use to avow my carelessness: I will write as though for the first time, or as if his letter had not reached me," said he, as he prepared to commence a fresh negotiation with A. O.; and more anxious than ever were the moments that intervened before a second answer was vouchsafed to his application.

It seemed as though the disingenuousness of the Money-lender was to keep pace with his own. Again an appointment was made; but no mention of St. Agnes le Clare, nor a syllable about Old street-road. A. O. consented to see B. A. on the morrow,—but it was at No. —, Greek-street, Soho; and this time, Basil kept a

check on his infirmities of memory by carefully depositing the memorandum in his desk.

The mercury of his elastic nature rose once more under the influence of this slight encouragement.—It is amazing in what unsubstantial indications the sanguine find grounds for hope.—As the powers of the microscope convert the green mould of some decaying object into verdant forests and bowers of bliss, the eye of youth discerns promise in the veering of a cloud, and its buoyant heart dances for joy at the broken strain of distant and unattainable music.

To contend, however, with the dreariness of a London November requires, on the part of a mere lover of pleasure, the utmost efforts of a sanguine temperament. The Western world seems laid under an interdict; the social frame broken up. No brilliant equipage—no laughing faces—no merry balls—no gaudy crowds—no gleaming windows lighted up for festivity, as he dashes along the streets at night. May-fair looks gloomy as if on the eve of a universal interment. The great mansions of the squares are as closely shuttered as if legions of dead lay coffined within; and the winter aspect of our metropolis is as indicative of depopulation as the summer ones of every other city in Europe. *We* prefer our woods when leafless, and our gardens when bereft of fruits and flowers. *We* repair from the country to town just as the former is putting on her robe of beauty, and the latter becoming insupportable from heat and dust.

"How cursedly boring is all this!" said Captain Blencowe, shrugging his shoulders, to Basil, whom, later in the day, he persuaded to take a turn with him in his cab in Hyde Park, where they found only a few venerable dowager carriages taking their daily airing, and looking like so many mourning-coaches washed with yellow.

"The air is mild this afternoon," replied Annesley, whose bosom's lord was sitting lightly on his throne, refreshed by the change of scene.

"*Air?*" reiterated Blencowe, with contempt; "thank Heaven, I get my long leave next week, and shall be off to Melton. What is a man to do with himself in town at this time of year?"

"I seldom find my day hang heavy," replied Basil.

"Ay, ay; *you* are new to it all. You will tell a different story when you have had as much of it as I have. I vow to God I don't know a soul in London at this moment."

"There are the Maitlands, who——"

"The Maitlands!—two marrying girls and a double-marrying mother! By the way, Basil, *you* certainly *do* find occupation for your time. But you keep your own secret. I suppose it is useless asking what takes you so often to the neighbourhood of South Audley-street. Well, well! I will say no more about it. I forgot that, at your age, such an inquiry is a leading question, to which your complexion has a prompt reply. I only wish South Audley, or any other street, contained anything or any lady to palliate the accursed dulness of a London winter. The advertisements of the Times assure us every other evil is remediable—that

there exists cures for the tooth-ache and smoky chimneys. If they would only tell one in what part of the metropolis antidotes are sold against *ennui!*——"

"They *do!*" observed Basil, pointing laughingly to the vast playbills displayed in red and black variegation at the door of an oilman's shop they were passing in Piccadilly, on their way back to St. James's-street. But at that moment the attention of his companion was attracted towards another object, a plain dark chariot, with the wheel of which their own was nearly locked by a concussion of coal-carts and stage-coaches, opposite Hatchett's. Dexterous coachmanship alone emancipated them from the collision.

"A lucky escape!" cried Blencowe, as his noble horse, roused by the incident, started off towards St. James's-street. "It would have been no joke had I smashed *his* panel."

"*Whose* panel?"

"Did you not see who was in that carriage?"

"A grave old fellow, who looked like a physician. Who was it?"

"Neither more nor less than the renowned A. O., of whom we were talking the other day at the Club."

Basil Annesley started. He almost fancied this might be another of Blencowe's leading questions, addressed to his complexion.

"I feel when I see that man," said Blencowe, with an air of disgust too earnest to be assumed, "as if looking at a rattlesnake in a cage. I always wonder *who* is to be the next victim. Even if asleep one knows that the reptile's fangs are brewing their fatal venom, and that some fated wretch may fall a victim to their next incision."

Luckily for Basil, this terrible prognostication escaped him. He was reflecting upon the absurdity of having gone to seek for the proprietor of that plain, but handsome equipage, in the squalid recesses of Paulet-street, St. Agnes le Clare!

The post of the following day brought him a letter from his mother. Lady Annesley appeared unusually depressed. There had been sickness in her household. The old gardener was on his death-bed.

"You may have sometimes found Barlingham desolate," wrote the recluse; "but at this moment it is so thoroughly saddened that I shall exonerate you, my dearest son, from your promised Christmas visit. I would not willingly expose your young heart to the sight of our sorrow or the hazard of our sickness."

After perusing such a letter, Annesley thanked Heaven he had not followed up his momentary project of avowing his embarrassments to his mother; and, with redoubled eagerness, he started in pursuit of the Money-lender.

During his sojourn in London, he had probably traversed Greek-street fifty times, without noting more than that it contained the usual double lines of tedious unmeaning brick houses peculiar to English streets; diversified only by varieties of insurance plates,—the Phœnix or the Sun, or exhibiting the interesting F. P., prating of the whereabout of their fire-plugs.

But now, every house appeared instinct with meaning. Its glaziers' or grocers' shops were not as the shops of other glaziers

and grocers; and on arriving within a few doors of the number specified by A. O.'s communication, he began to count the houses, the earlier to familiarize himself with the "complement extern" of the Money-lender's habitation.

It was one of those square roomy mansions, which still announce that Soho was a fashionable quarter of the town, at the moment when the higher classes, taking sudden fright at the insalubrity of the banks of the river (till the reign of the Second James, their favourite residence,) migrated as far as possible from the influence of its miasma. But though spacious, the house in question was nearly as cheerless to look at as the den in Paulet-street. The windows of its vast frontage were closed by shutters, the paint of which was probably coeval with the edifice, if indeed its complexion could be conjectured through panes of glass so encrusted with the unmolested dust of years, that some winged seed might have taken root in the soil, had the well-trimmed parterres of the adjoining sooty Eden of Soho-square produced specimens of vegetation so volatile as the thistle.

The door, ill-fitted to its shrunken case, was of a dingy, ochrous complexion, and even the worn-out and broken cane blinds of the parlour were so closely surmounted by closed shutters, as to preclude all idea that the house was inhabited. It sounded hollow as the grave, when, in spite of appearances, Basil hazarded a modest knock and gentler ring.

Promptly, however, as at some well-lackeyed lordly mansion, the summons was answered. An old woman of crippled shape, and having a complexion many degrees darker than her tawny front and the dirty fly-cap that surmounted it, opened, and held wide open the door, not as if awaiting his inquiries, but as though he were expected, and had only to enter. A glance at his feet, as hinting a hope that the door-scraper had not been overlooked, was all she vouchsafed him.

"In the back parlour," croaked her discordant voice, before he recovered self-possession to ask a question. It was clear he was to make his own way in this desolate temple of echoes.

With his heart beating more irregularly than he would have cared to own to his friend Blencowe, Basil accordingly advanced along the wide but bare and dirty passage, and knocked at the second door, which was slightly ajar. No one replied. He pushed it open, and went in.

CHAPTER III.

Let him who wants to know the value of money, try to borrow some.
COLTON.

THE chamber into which Basil had thus unceremoniously introduced himself, though empty, had all the appearance of having been recently occupied. Volumes of sulphurous yellow smoke ascended from a black mass of coals in the rusty grate, interspersed with damp shavings, in token that some effort at least had been made to

ignite them; and an old-fashioned bureau standing open against the wall, exhibited files of papers, and one or two open letters, besides a compact phalanx of diminutive rouleaux, apparently of sterling value.

To these objects, however, after a cursory glance round the room, Basil paid not the slightest attention. Throwing himself into a roomy arm-chair, of which the horse-hair stuffing protruded at intervals through the well-worn black leather covering, and the channelled mahogany arms promised anything but a pleasant lounge, he contemplated with listless gaze the old-fashioned parlour, with its bare boards; whereof the knots stood prominent from the softer level of the wood, worn down by much friction; even as the more obstinate defects of a human character become more remarkable when its weaker qualities have subsided under the pressure of years. The walls were of wainscot, diversified by heavy festoons of flowers and fruit, dividing the compartments, and indicating oaken panelling. But the wood being concealed by an ignominious coating of paint which appeared to have been contending for nearly a century with that yellow London smoke, of which the adjoining fireplace furnished so satisfactory a specimen—the original richness of effect was lost.

The only object serving by way of decoration to that dingy wainscot, was a paper almanack nailed up by tacks at the corners, beside the bureau. The only object adorning the floor, was a square of discoloured drugget, constituting a sort of dais that extended from the fireplace beyond the bureau; a straw chair pushed back from which, had evidently been in recent use.—Such was the official residence of the redoubtable A. O.

For some minutes, young Annesley sat motionless, with eyes apparently intent upon the cheerless objects around him, but in reality labouring to resume his self-possession. At length he grew impatient, and started up. But instead of approaching the bureau, containing the only desultory objects of interest in the room, he took his stand mechanically on the drugget before the fireplace, as though the latter had emitted warmth, or the former comfort. To approach a depository of written papers belonging to another, would have appeared criminal to a mind so honourable. Far better bear the impatience or listlessness of *ennui*, than relieve the tediousness of the moment by a breach of confidence. At last, after exhibiting the ordinary symptoms of youthful petulance,—venting a few ejaculations against the smoky fireplace,—and tapping, first with one foot, then with another, on the sonorous floor ill covered with that thin and scanty drugget,—he was about to fall with indignation upon the thin green cord serving as bell-rope, in order to summon the old woman in the dirty fly-cap, and ascertain why his dignity was thus trifled with, when lo, just as he placed his hand upon the string, a slight sound, proceeding from the furthest corner, induced him to turn round, and there, as if issuing from the wainscot, he discerned the unknown proprietor of that dreary apartment. One of the carved panels probably concealed a door through which he had, unobserved, effected his entrance.

Involuntarily, Basil advanced towards the new comer, as though it were *his* business to do the honours of the place. But when

within a few paces of his host, who stirred not a step to meet him, the young man stopped short; startled out of all self-possession by a single glance at the figure presented to his observation.

There was nothing, however, very remarkable in the person of A. O.—though above the middle height, a certain ignoble character of form and gesture deprived him of the advantages usually inseparable from a commanding stature. His dress, if neither coarse nor rusty, was of an inferior cut; and though his dark eyes might have passed for intelligent in the head of any other man, there was a discrepancy between the blackness of their tint, enhanced by the profuse black eyelashes and eyebrows by which they were overhung, and the scanty grey curls, almost approaching to white, that figured on either side a head, the crown of which was bare and lustrous. It was, in short, a face and figure, which, in squalid attire, with a beard and a slouched hat, would have passed muster among the itinerant dealers in old clothes, whose cries disturb the inhabitants of the West End, at an hour when none but Jews, fish-women, chickweed-boys, scavengers' carts, and letter-carriers, are astir in the slumbering streets of the more civilized quarters of the town.

It was not, however, the Israelitish type of the individual before him, which arrested the courtesies of Basil Annesley. From the first he had heard A. O. classed among the "Jews," and expected nothing better than to find the outward man of the Money-lender accordant with that inward specification. His amazement arose solely from the discovery that the decently-attired and robust man before him was no other than the threadbare and decrepit individual whose key he had restored to him in Paulet-street, St Agnes le Clare; though as different in form and seeming as both the one and the other from the well-dressed gentleman in the brown chariot, pointed out to him by Captain Blencowe, in Piccadilly, as the great and influential A. O.

Startled by a transmutation so little short of magical, young Annesley became perplexed and incoherent in the exordium to which he now attempted to give utterance. He scarcely knew whether it would be better to announce or pass over his discovery. It was essential to him to propitiate the Money-lender. Was this object likely to be accomplished by the detection and development of one of those strange mysteries, in which it seemed his pleasure to envelop his proceedings?—

While Basil was still debating within himself, this urgent point, the singular master of that singular house keeping his eye fixed upon the intruder with the same scrutinizing interest which had marked their first encounter, relaxed the spasm of catalepsy into which his sudden apparition appeared to have startled his visitor, by advancing towards the bureau, abruptly turning round the straw chair placed before it, and, while appropriating it to his own use, motioning to Basil to resume the great elbow-chair in which he had already ensconced himself. His first words decided the question which still agitated the mind of young Annesley.

"Unless I am mistaken, young man," said he, coolly, "we have met before?"—

"And so recently, that I can scarcely account for my own uncer-

tainty on the subject," was Annesley's frank rejoinder. "Yet there is so little analogy between——"

"Fine feathers make fine birds,—foul feathers foul ones," interrupted A. O. in the same hard but measured voice, looking down as he spoke upon the sleeve of a coat which, unless in a smoky back-parlour in Soho, could scarcely have pretended to the designation of fine.

"I had, however, little suspicion," he resumed, "that in the gay young gentleman who took compassion on the predicament of a bungling old man, the other morning, I beheld the identical B. A.; an appointment with whom had enticed me, in inclement weather and to no purpose, to that remote quarter of the town."

"The distance was as inconvenient to me as to yourself," replied Annesley, recovering his self-possession under the influence of his discovery that the man before him was either an impostor or a mountebank. "It was *you*, sir, who wrote to me, assigning another house than your own for our interview."

"I have houses in various quarters of the town," replied the Money-lender, unabashed by his retort;—"in St. James's, to transact business with spendthrift lords, and lend my aid towards patching the ragged vesture of fools of quality;—in Finsbury, for such as honour me by an appeal to my strong-box, but not with the disclosure of their names.—It is my rule to place confidence only in those who show confidence in *me*."

"In addressing myself to one known to me only by the initials of A. O., I did not feel bound to disclose more than my own of B. A.," replied the young soldier, gravely.

"Mine are pretty universally known to express my real name," replied the Money-lender. "I am called Abednego Osalez. And now permit me to inquire your motive for repairing to so obscure and troublesome a quarter of the town for the despatch of business which your letter described as pressing,—yet, after all, leaving it undone?"

"May I first inquire, in my turn," replied Basil, encouraged rather than daunted by his *sang froid*, "why, after sending me on that occasion to the extremity of the city, you condescend, on my second application, (conceived in precisely the same terms,) to receive me here?"

"Perhaps," replied the Money-lender, evidently in conceit with the client who had unwittingly obliged him under his garb of misery,—"perhaps, because your carelessness on *that* occasion induced me to suppose your exigencies less urgent than I implied from the terms of your original letter. The man who could afford to wait, had claims to higher consideration. And now, I am surely entitled to as frank an answer."

The double mystery was now succinctly and readily explained. From Basil's avowal of having had his pocket picked, the Money-lender probably deduced an inference that it was because, unused to be the depository of valuable effects, he was thus careless; for his momentary goodhumour seemed overcast.

"This is the first time, I fancy, we have done business together?" said he, starting from his reverie, and abruptly addressing young

Annesley, who replied by an affirmative bow, "Do you bring me no letter of recommendation from one of my clients?"

"From no one," he replied, instinctively recalling to mind the unsatisfactory terms in which these very clients treated him in his absence.

"It is merely my newspaper advertisements, then, which have attracted your notice?"—

"Not altogether," replied Annesley. "More than one of my brother officers have been extricated from pecuniary difficulty by your assistance.—From them, I became aware of your mode of business; and——"

"Did they not also add," interrupted the Money-lender, "that you should not apply to me unless your case were desperate? Did they not tell you, 'if any other earthly resource be open to you, beware of A. O.?' Did they not call me shark, cormorant, vulture, usurer, JEW?—You know they did!—Not a mess of any regiment in the service in which I am not thus opprobriated."

Basil, already repenting his indiscretion in having allowed the words "brother officers" to escape him, as too clearly indicative of his social position, would not, by an affirmative reply, hazard the exposure of his friends to the vindictive reprisals of such an enemy as A. O.

"You are cautious, young gentleman!" observed the Money-lender, whose large dark eyes seemed to penetrate the most hidden thoughts of his companion. "Caution, however, is not the parent of confidence. You come to me in the hope of opening my strong-box; and will scarcely accomplish the exploit with close lips and a closer heart. A calling such as mine necessitates some degree of mystery. But when once a *bona fide* negotiation commences, all must be above-board—all truth and daylight. I have told you my name is Abednego Osalez—I now ask the favour of your own."

Basil hesitated. He could not bear to disgrace the honourable patronymic borne by the object of his filial veneration, by inscription in the registers of a Jew.

"You will be pleased to remember," resumed the Money-lender, "that no act can be authentic between us, unless the business be negotiated under our real names. If, therefore, you scruple to intrust me with yours, this interview has already lasted too long."

Apprehending, from his decided mode of uttering these words, that the peremptory Jew was about to rise and dismiss him, the agitated applicant murmured, in a low voice, "My name, sir, is Annesley."

"*Annesley?*" reiterated the Money-lender, as if requiring him to be more articulate.

"Basil Annesley!"

The Jew rose with some precipitation from his seat, and, for a moment or two, occupied himself in turning over the papers lying open on his bureau, as if in search of writing-materials, to enable him to take notes of the business of his new client.

"You have lately, I believe, entered the Grenadier Guards?" said he, still addressing Annesley, but without turning round.

"I have been rather more than a year in the army."

"And during that short space of time you have contrived to embarrass yourself?"

"Many contrive to do so in less than a twentieth part of it!' replied Basil, as if resolved not to be browbeaten by a stranger.

"Not the well-conditioned son of a mother in straitened circumstances," replied the insolent Jew, who seemed endowed with an intuitive insight into the position of his client.

"I applied to you, sir, as a Money-lender, not as a counsellor," said Basil, haughtily, rising in his turn. "My business may be briefly explained. I am, as you seem to be aware, the only son of the late Sir Bernard Annesley. I have immediate necessity for a sum of three hundred and fifty pounds. My allowance of three hundred a year——"

"She allows you three hundred a year? Too much!—too much for *her* to give, or you to receive," muttered the Jew, in indistinct tones, of which, however, not a syllable escaped the ear of Annesley.

"I observed, sir, that my allowance of three hundred a year and my pay," persisted Basil, not noticing his interruption, "would enable me to pay off, by monthly instalments, both interest and principal, in the course of the next two years and a half."

"And should you die in the interim, young gentleman, what security have I, pray, for my money?" demanded the usurer, with a sneer.

"I could effect an insurance on my life, assigning you the policy," said Basil, in a less-assured voice.

"You have very soon become familiar with the expedients of embarrassed men," murmured the Jew, still without turning towards him, but apparently engrossed by the arrangement of his papers.

"I was informed by a brother officer that such was the mode in which you arranged a similar matter for himself," replied Basil, with increasing hesitation.

"Captain Blencowe, eh? Ay, I remember. Six years ago, however. Your friend has a good memory; so have I; and I admit that he redeemed the debt like a gentleman some time within the term of his acceptance."

"I should be glad to convince you that you would obtain in myself a client equally honourable," rejoined Basil, somewhat reassured.

"The will may not be wanting; but I doubt the means. Young Blencowe belonged to a moneyed family. I knew with whom I had to deal. Were *you* to fail me, I might put the whole Annesley family into thumbscrews without eliciting so much as a ten-pound note for your behoof. Persons of my occupation, sir, are forced to keep a pretty accurate tariff of the fortunes and consciences of those likely to come within their line of business. I had a relative of yours—one of the Yorkshire Annesleys—two years in the King's Bench at my expense."

"But I conclude he paid you at last?" demanded Basil, too ignorant of the connectionships of his father's family to refute the accusation.

"With his life. He died in prison, leaving me the creditor of heirs who were penniless!"

Strange to tell, there was a tone of triumph rather than of vexation in the Money-lender's mode of alluding to this frustration of his interests.

"But I, who am both young and solvent," persisted Basil, "do not intend to defraud you either by living or dying. I give you my word of honour as a gentleman that——"

"The word of honour of a gentleman has no value, and should have no mention, in a money-dealing transaction," interrupted the Jew. "The affair between us is simply one of speculation.—You want money—I have to sell it to you,—as much as possible to my own advantage.—I must, therefore, either have good security and fair interest; or, without security, such interest as may induce me to incur the risk."

"I have already offered you the latter alternative," said Basil, bluntly.

"I have been offered five hundred per cent. by needy men, before now," replied the Money-lender, with a curl of the lip; "ay, and without swallowing the bait. The promise of a stranger is not worth its weight in gold. In the first place, Mr. Annesley, have you even so much as reflected upon the amount of the interest of your debt, and keeping up the policy of insurance, besides the expense of the execution of the deed, added to the sinking fund for the gradual defrayment of the three hundred and fifty pounds?" demanded the pragmatical Jew.

"I am in the receipt of four hundred and thirty pounds a year," replied Basil, evasively.

"And for what purpose is it assigned you?" retorted the Money-lender. "To afford you a becoming position in the world.—What right, therefore, have you to alienate this provision, so as to deprive yourself of the necessaries of your sphere of society, and become exposed to the shame of petty embarrassments?"

"None!" replied Basil, astounded at the inexplicable liberties taken by his new acquaintance, yet not daring to resent remonstrances indicative of favourable dispositions towards him. "But the shame to which I may expose myself by the limitation of my income, is surely nothing compared with that which would befal me, a month hence, when my acceptances fall due, and I am unable to meet them."

"But you are still a minor?" remonstrated the Jew.

"Those who were satisfied with my endorsements, asked no questions; contenting themselves with the engagement of a gentleman, the son of a man of honour," replied Basil, with firmness.

At that moment, the Money-lender accidentlaly let fall a paper he held in his hand; and the mechanical courtesy with which Basil started forward to assist in recovering it, probably tended to recal to the recollection of A. O. the kindness displayed by the young guardsman towards the old pauper of Paulet-street. On turning to receive it from his extended hand, the countenance of the Jew had relaxed into a more Christian-like expression.

"At least," said he, fixing his dark eyes approvingly on the in-

genuous countenance of young Annesley—"at least, there was value received for these bills of exchange?—You are not applying to me for the means of covering another usurious transaction?—Do not deceive me, young sir. Through my extensive connexions with the monied world, I have the means of ascertaining the truth."

"I have no disposition to deceive you, Mr. Abednego Osalez," replied young Annesley, with some hauteur, "But if I came not hither to seek a counsellor, still less am I disposed to find a confessor in my man of business. The purpose for which I require these funds, regards you as little as the mode by which you have acquired them regards myself. I ask no questions:—let me advise you to be equally discreet."

"No occasion for *you* to ask questions!"—said his singular companion, continuing to examine his papers, and file them carefully, all the time he was speaking. "The world has explanations stereotyped to your hand. Everybody knows the Money-lender to be a Jew,—the Jew, a usurer,—the usurer, a criminal in the eye of the law. Christ drove the money-changers from his Temple—man expels them from his tribunals.—The Jew is one who *must* have acquired his funds by extortion and fraud;—one who probably began life as a corsair—pickpocket—resurrection-man—assassin,—no matter what amount of obloquy you heap upon his head!—He cannot have too narrowly escaped the hands of the hangman—he cannot be too grossly stigmatized. He has caused the ruin of thousands—

> **And if a man have need of poison now,**
> **Here lives the caitiff wretch would sell it him.**

Admit that I portray myself as you have heard me portrayed?—Why, therefore, institute inquiries into my conduct or its motives?"—

Basil Annesley was startled out of all self-possession by this strange appeal. From the first words uttered by his new acquaintance, he had been impressed by the superiority of his tone and phraseology to his garb and mode of life. But now, the eloquence of his words and energy of his gestures, were characteristic of the scholar and the gentleman, rather than of the vulgar Jew—the jobbing money-broker.—Poor Basil almost quailed under the glances of the excited man who gave utterance to this vivid apostrophe.

"I have, I admit, heard you ungraciously spoken of," said he, with a degree of frankness rivalling that of his interlocutor. "That what was told me exercised no very important influence over my opinions may be inferred from my presence here."

"You are here simply because your position is desperate!" coolly rejoined A. O. "You are here because there is no hope elsewhere. You may also, perhaps, have heard from Captain Blencowe, and other victims who have escaped without serious injury from my clutches, that even the crocodile of the shores of Pactolus is sometimes moved to a caprice of pity; and are willing to try whether anything in your youth and inexperience may reach his milder mood."

"My youth and inexperience at least encourage you to trifle with

me!" cried Basil, with a rising colour, more enraged by the ironical smile pervading the countenance of A. O., than by his words. And, having snatched his hat from the window-seat, he was preparing without ceremony to quit the room.

"In money-dealings, Mr. Annesley," said his companion, undismayed by this tacit threat of breaking up the conference, "you will find the command of your temper five per cent. in your favour. You cannot afford to quarrel with me. At this moment, I am the necessary evil that must redeem you from the still greater of immediate dishonour. Do me the favour, sir, to sign this paper," said he, placing in the hands of Basil, one which, during their conference, he had been quietly preparing. "It is, as even *your* slight knowledge of business must assure you, of no legal value. It is the obligation of a gentleman, and must derive its sole importance from a gentleman's signature. It will neither enable me to imprison my debtor, nor molest him. But it will remind Sir Bernard Annesley's son, that, within three years after attaining his majority, he has engaged to pay me back a sum of four hundred pounds; whereof the interest, at five per cent., must be quarterly forthcoming."

Basil took the promissory note into his hands, and seeing that it was phrased strictly according to the announcement of A. O., conceived himself well off at having so small a bonus as fifty pounds demanded of him as the penalty of the transaction. But what was his amazement when, on taking his place at the bureau, to sign the paper, he found lying before him a printed cheque of one of the first banking houses of the West End, bearing the signature Abednego Osalez, and directing the firm in question "to pay to Mr. Annesley or bearer the sum of four hundred pounds!"

Scarcely able to believe the evidence of his eyes—his cheeks flushed by the excitement of the moment—his heart throbbing almost to agony with the consciousness of release from the first great embarrassment of his life, Basil, ere he accepted one document or executed the other, was eager in expressions of astonishment and gratitude to one whom he could scarcely regard in any other light than that of a benefactor. But on turning round for the purpose, he found that A. O., instead of remaining behind his chair to watch his proceedings, was at the door, parleying with the unsightly crone who officiated as his clerk of the presence.

"Tell him I am engaged. Say it is impossible for me to see him this morning!" said the Money-lender, in the imperative tone he had assumed in the earlier part of his colloquy with Basil.

"I have told him so already, sir?" croaked the old woman, "but he will not be denied. He has got out of his cabriolet, and is now on the door-steps awaiting."

"*Let* him wait!" said the money-lender. "If he persist in coming in, show him into the front parlour, and open one of the shutters, till I am ready to receive him. You perceive, Mr. Annesley, that I am waited for. I dispense, therefore, the effusions of thankfulness expanding upon your lips," resumed A. O., turning towards Basil, who stood transfixed beside the bureau, the cheque in one hand, and the promissory note in the other.

"Have you signed it?" continued he, pointing to the latter document. "Be quick, if you have carefully perused the terms. Never, while you live, put your name to a paper of which you have not, to a syllable, mastered the contents. Nay,—spare me your declarations of confidence: you may have less grounds for gratitude than you suppose. Remember the fable of the little fish thrown back by the wary angler into the river, to become a bigger. Be not too sure that the Money-lender is not facilitating your first ingress into his net, in order to secure your return."

Basil Annesley, who had now both read and signed the promissory note, and placed the printed cheque in his pocket-book, smiled at this sinister prognostication.

"I do not choose you to be ruined by anybody but myself," observed the Money-lender with a smile: "in proof of which, let me advise you to place that pocket-book in a securer place than the one from which you own my letter to have been subtracted. Above all, deposit this very morning the money you are about to receive, with your banker, so as to be ready for the exigencies which——well, well! I will cut short my lecture!"—said he, interrupting himself when he saw the colour rising in the cheeks of Basil. "You receive sterling advice, I perceive, less thankfully than sterling coin."

"The gentleman is in the parlour, sir," said the old woman, again thrusting in her dingy face and dingier cap.

"So much the better," replied the Money-lender, with a bitter sneer. "It may serve to bring so fine a gentleman to his senses, to make acquaintance with the mice and spiders of my desolate habitation."

In another moment, Basil Annesley, still misdoubting whether he were awake or asleep, had shaken hands with the new acquaintance who had acted by him the part of an old friend; and was once more in the street.

A few paces before him, stood a plain but handsome cabriolet, of which the tiger who held the reins wore a plain undress livery. But the horse of which the little fellow was in charge was not to be mistaken. It was one renowned in the glories of Hyde Park;—a celebrated cab, announcing that the fine gentleman just then cooling his heels in the dismantled dining-room of A. O. was no less a personage than his Grace the Duke of Rochester.

CHAPTER IV.

My spirits leap aloft like sparkling waters
Flung from a fountain—buoyant—free—and filling
The common air with freshness.—MARLOWE.

THAT day was a day of overflowing joy to Basil Annesley. Had the pavement intervening between Soho square and St. James's-street, been tesselated with gems, like the sanctuaries of the Alhambra, or of Aladdin's palace, instead of displaying the half-frosty, half-filthy flagstones of one of the least inviting quarters of

the West End, he could not have felt more elated, or have made his way more lightsomely of foot, than on his road to Herries and Farquhar's, where, after receiving his four hundred pounds, he paid the first half year's interest thereon in advance, to the account of Abednego Osalez, Esq., in order that, for twelve months to come, he might be conscience-clear as regarded the Money-lender.

Let him who, after labouring under the pressure of pecuniary embarrassments, finds himself suddenly and unexpectedly released from thraldom, declare whether any earthly triumph can exceed that soul-stirring emancipation.

> The king may make a belted knight,
> A marquis, duke, and a' that—

but, far surpassing any ennoblement recorded in the peerage, is the creation of a free man out of a wretch on whose shoulder the gripe of the bailiff has been felt by agonizing anticipation.

As regarded Annesley's feelings, he was now out of debt; for he was in debt only within limit of his means. Four-and-twenty hours before, he had looked forward to the dreadful 28th of December which was to find him in possession of three hundred pounds, or steep him in shame to the very lips, as a criminal to the day of execution. He would not have felt half so overjoyed at being declared heir-apparent to the Duke of Rochester, as to know that four hundred pounds were that day placed to his credit at Coutts's.

How little,—how very little,—do those real potentates of modern times who sway the destinies of nations and individuals with a rod of gold, and issue their decrees in bank notes and Exchequer bills,—the bankers of money-spinning Europe,—conjecture the fearful nature of the passions imprisoned in that Pandora's box, their iron safe;—a world of magic spells, compassed within the simple parchment covers of the books of their constituents;—the fiat of life and death occasionally inscribed on one of the printed cheques which their clerk mechanically cashes, enregistering the number of the notes he gives in exchange with as cool deliberation as though the heart of the expectant "bearer" throbbed not with ecstasy at the sight of those bringers of glad tidings to his necessitous household. The whole romance of civilization is in fact comprised within the magic initials of L. S. D.—MONEY is indeed power;—the "Open Sesame" to the seemingly impervious rock of human destiny.—Of all the masquerading guises in which false Philosophy loves to parade herself, contempt of MONEY, the ladder by which almost every earthly advantage is attainable, is surely the most absurd.

Poor Basil, among the rest, had often blazoned forth his contempt of riches; labouring to reconcile his mother to her straitened means by assurances of his indifference to the dross of this world; nay, had even deceived *himself* by frequent protestations of indifference to the gorgeous gewgaws of opulence.—He fancied himself content, nay, proud and happy, to be poor. Yet the possession of a paltry four hundred pounds was driving him half out of his wits for joy.

For though the origin of his embarrassments was of a nature far from dishonouring to his head or heart, it was one he dared not have disclosed to his austere mother. Almost, indeed, would he have preferred to pass in her eyes for the dupe of the gaming-table, or for a frivolous spendthrift ruined by idle extravagance, than expose the truth.

Not one guinea of the money had been applied to his own use. The necessities of another had caused him to pledge his honourable name beyond his power of redemption. And yet, he had not even enjoyed the happiness of claiming sympathy from that other in his embarrassment. He had been forced to pretend opulence at the moment of signing the bills of exchange, and indifference on the subject ever since, lest the obligation should afflict the delicate and high-minded individual whom his interference had been the means of rescuing from the utmost extremity of distress.

There was only one drawback on his exulting happiness:—his mother's illness. Even this, however, was less acutely felt than when sinking under the apprehension that his difficulties might shortly aggravate the evil; and now, disregarding her prohibition, and forestalling his purposed Christmas visit, he readily obtained a few days' leave of absence; and, armed with a thousand little tokens of kindness for the invalids, hurried to Barlingham. Instead of affording Lady Annesley time to renew her prohibition, he chose to take her by surprise.

Few are the contingencies in this world which justify taking people by surprise. Husbands and wives have often had to rue the officious affection which impelled them prematurely into each other's presence; and the best household, the most united family, the most attached circle of friends, cannot be too accurately apprized of the exact moment at which the absent one is likely to rush once more into their arms.

Poor Basil reached the Grange, his heart overflowing not simply with the milk of human kindness, but with its cream. Late in the evening he reached Lyndhurst by the coach; and, preferring to restore circulation to his chilly limbs by a walk of a mile and a half across the fields, to a three miles' jumble in a postchaise, through one of the most unsatisfactory lanes that ever besloughed the wagon of the despairing farmer, he accepted the offer of a countryman to accompany him with his *valise*, and cheerfully cut across to Barlingham by a way familiar to him from boyhood.

To beguile the dreariness of his lonely walk, he almost unconsciously burst forth into a song, the produce of one of the olden poets.

Truce to thy fond misgivings
These fruitless tears give o'er,
No absence can divide us, love,
No parting part us more!
Mountains and seas may rise between,
To mock our baffled will;
But heart in heart, and soul in soul,
We bide together still.

Where'er I go, or far or near,
I cannot be alone;
Thy voice is ever in mine ear,
Thy hand is in mine own;
Thy head upon my pillow rests,
Thy words my bosom thrill,
And heart in heart, and soul in soul,
We bide together still.

And when stern Death shall work his worst,
And all our joys are done,
E'en by the mystery that unites
The dial and the sun,
Though one exist in heavenly bliss
One in this world of ill,
Yet heart in heart, and soul in soul,
We'll bide together still.

As his voice died away, the loneliness seemed drearier than before. The weather was frosty. Not a breath was stirring; the moon had risen; and, under its influence, and that of the bitterness of the weather, the landscape exhibited a ghastly and death-like appearance. The fields were free from all transit of living thing. Not so much as a plough left upturned in the furrows, for the readier re-commencement of the morrow's labours, as at more propitious seasons of the year. Not so much as a stoat, or urchin, stealing in quest of midnight prey from hedge to hedge.

When, at last, Basil came in view of the Grange, standing black and desolate in the moonlight, in the centre of its open square of dark and leafless trees, it was like approaching the uninhabited castle of some fairy tale. Not so much as a dog gave tongue as they crossed the little bridge leading from the moat to the chief entrance; and, lest Lady Annesley should be alarmed by the unwonted sound of the door-bell at so late an hour, her son made his way round to the postern leading to the offices, and entered the kitchen with a degree of humility most vexatious to his temporary esquire of the body; who had anticipated that, in escorting to the Grange the heir-apparent of the family, he should force a triumphal entry, drums beating and colours flying. Basil's hurried injunction to the two astonished women-servants, who screamed aloud on beholding him, to take care of his valise and its bearer, while *he* made his way into the hall, scarcely reconciled poor Hodge to the indignity of stealing into the house like a thief in the dark.

Leaving the Hampshire bumpkin to the consolations of a blazing fire and substantial supper, young Annesley seized the candle presented by the blushing, curtseying handmaiden of old Dorcas; from whom he had already extracted that his mother and her waiting-woman were in attendance upon old Nicholas, who had been removed to a bedroom on the first floor, having, it was feared, not many days to live.

"My lady has ordered tea in half an hour in her sitting-room," added the damsel. "Shall I acquaint her, sir, that you are here? Or would you rather I should go and make a fire, Mr. Basil, in your own room?"

Young Annesley accepted the latter alternative. Unwilling to startle the dying man by too sudden an appearance in his chamber, he determined to wait the coming of his mother in her own apartment.

The sitting-room usually occupied by Lady Annesley during the winter months, was a small chamber on the first floor, adjoining her bed-room. The ceiling, as in all the rooms in the Grange, was not only low, but traversed and deformed by heavy beams; and the floor of stucco, or composition. Such a chamber, however, its embayed windows being thickly curtained, and its floor concealed by a carpet, is more easily rendered warm and comfortable for the long cheerless winter evenings, than one of nobler proportions; and the rich saloons of many a lordly castle might have found scope for envy, during that bitter weather, in the little snuggery to which, when Basil made his way into the sanctuary, a blazing wood-fire was affording the cheerful glow so welcome to the eye of the benighted traveller.

This room was, of all the house, the one least familiar to Basil. It was four years since he had spent a winter at the Grange. His return from Germany had chanced in the summer season; and the preceding Christmas, having recently joined his regiment, he had been forced to pass in town. During his holidays, Lady Annesley usually inhabited her drawing-room, on the ground-floor, as containing her musical instruments, and the book-cases calculated to afford amusement or instruction to her son; and it was only on occasion of some brief interview between them, that she ever received him in what she called her dressing-room, though the ceremonies of her simple toilet were performed in the sleeping-room adjoining. It possessed, accordingly, all the charm of prohibition in the eyes of young Annesley. It was the blue chamber of the Grange; the only one into which he was not permitted to penetrate uninvited.

On the present occasion, he felt privileged. His visit was as the return of the prodigal son; and he chose to anticipate the favours reserved for such an incident. Moreover, Hannah had informed him that the only fire then burning was in my lady's room; and the temperature of that December night was so little to be trifled with, that he entertained no scruple about invading the forbidden precincts.

"I don't wonder my mother is so fond of it," was Basil's ejaculation, as, stationed upon the Persian rug before the fire, he cast his eyes around the cheerful chamber in which Lady Annesley had assembled such remnants of antique furniture as she had found at the Grange;—the old carved chairs and tables, and a twisted legged cabinet or two, imparting to the place the Elizabethan character he had recently observed in London as the height of the fashion. From the carved ebony desk, on which Lady Annesley's handkerchief was still lying, to the *priedieu* in a recess near the fireplace, which was fitted up as an oratory, everything was so strictly in keeping as the bower chamber of a ladye-fair of the sixteenth century, that it might have served as a study for Cattermole, or as the oriel of sweet Anne Page.

"And yet, what utter solitude,—what isolation from her caste and kind," was his second reflection, on recalling to mind that this snuggery, so charming as a retreat from the severity of a winter's night, was Lady Annesley's abode from year's-end to year's-end, season after season. "A woman must have either a very good, or a very bad conscience, to find happiness in such complete alienation from society."

That the former alternative was the origin of his beloved mother's retreat, was so naturally his conviction, as to excuse the second conjecture, though breathed only to himself. It was not with him *there*, however, as in the den of the Money-changer. He felt it no treachery to examine, more leisurely than his mother's presence on the spot had ever yet enabled him, the objects around him. They were part and parcel of his mother, even as he, her only son, was a portion of herself; and the time must come, though he had never hazarded the anticipation, when they would become his own.

In the tediousness, therefore, of waiting for Lady Annesley's appearance, he cast his eyes from the heavy Persian carpets muffling the floor, to the bronze lamps brightening every nook of the antiquated chamber. On the chimney ledge of carved Portland stone, against which he was leaning, stood two old agate chalices of great beauty; and between them, on a slab of green jasper, an antique bronze of considerable value, though exhibiting only an unsightly reptile, formed of that matchless metal of Corinth, of which all modern imitations fail to acquire the glowing tinge, arising from the admixture of the more precious metals in the outpourings of the rich old city, from whose burning ruins fused forth the metal unwittingly created by the spoliating hand of man.

On the wall opposite the fireplace hung a fine portrait, well known to artists as one of the *chef d'œuvres* of Sir Joshua: a likeness of Lord L., the father of Lady Annesley, wearing numerous foreign orders, commemorative of the distinctions of his diplomatic career. A marble statuette of a child, on an isolated pedestal of giallo antico, filled one corner of the room (the others being completed with hanging shelves of carved ebony, filled with books); a female child of exquisite grace and beauty, evidently the work of a first-rate hand, which Basil fancied he had heard whispered by Dorcas in his boyhood, to be an early portrait of his sister, Mrs. Vernon.

All these objects he had noticed before. But upon Lady Annesley's desk lay a square book, covered with dark velvet, and having golden clasps of great beauty and value, like the mass-books of wealthy Catholics: inducing the renewal of a suspicion he had sometimes entertained, that his mother was secretly attached to a faith which was that of neither her husband nor her ancestors.

Curious to determine whether it were, indeed, a *Livre d'heures*, he opened the clasps; when, to his utter surprise, he found that the seeming book was a picture-case, containing on one side the enamelled portrait of a man, on the other, under a glass, a lock of glossy hair of raven blackness.

Basil stood utterly confounded. His late father, as he knew from portraits and tradition, was fair as a Saxon. His grandfather,

Lord L., was now looking him in the face, in attestation that *he* had no affinity with the individual depicted in that mysterious miniature. Lady Annesley was one of three daughters—his co-heiresses; nor, as well as Basil could recal to mind, had she a single male relation near enough to account for his picture being in her possession. What was the meaning of all this?—He fixed his eyes searchingly upon the portrait, as if to interrogate its right and title to be found in his mother's keeping.

The face was one of more interest than beauty: dark, high-browed, with a profusion of black hair, and eyes that derived a deeper shade from the reflection. The mouth was of rare beauty, yet unpleasing expression—tempered by an infusion of scorn little in accordance with the mournful character of the eyes; and, on the whole, it was one of those countenances which fascinate the attention even while impressing the beholder with an unfavourable opinion of the original. The age of the person represented could not exceed five-and-twenty, and the dress was that worn by English gentlemen at the commencement of the reign of George III.

The more the attention of Basil became riveted upon the picture, the stronger was his impression that some mysterious interest must be connected with an object, which he had attained the age of twenty years without perceiving in his mother's possession. In his boyish days, in those holidays of affection, when the secret treasures of a mother are brought forth to amuse a sick child or console an afflicted one, he had often been allowed to admire the contents of his mother's cabinets;—curious shells, rare minerals, antique rings, the old-fashioned repeater, with its massive chain and enamelled gewgaws. Nay, there was a valuable miniature of Lady Annesley's mother, the Lady L., in her black lace hood and point stomacher, set in diamonds and enamel, with an L. and coronet flourished in seed-pearls upon the braid of hair forming the reverse, which had actually been allowed him as a plaything, in the convalescence succeeding a dangerous illness. Yet of the miniature in the velvet cover, he had never been suffered to obtain a glimpse.

He had just replaced it on the desk and himself upon the hearth-rug, when the door opened, and Lady Annesley made her appearance.

Prepared to find her as gratified by his visit as he was pleased with his own alacrity in paying it, Basil was moved almost to awe, by the rigid coldness of her mode of receiving him. After rebuking his disobedience in being there, she coolly informed him that, with dangerous illness in her household, his presence would be an inconvenience.

"In that case, I will be off to-morrow," replied Basil, trying to recover, or conceal his chagrin. "But, at least, dearest mother, forgive me so far as to bear with me this one night. I could not endure the anxiety of supposing you ill, without bringing my own eyes to verify the state of your health."

"Another time, honour me with your confidence so far as to believe that I tell you the exact truth," said Lady Annesley, sternly. "I have been ill,—I am well again;—unless, indeed, the vexation of being thus broken in upon, should produce a recurrence of my disposition."

While expressing his hopes that he might not have so great an evil on his conscience, Basil saw the eyes of his mother wander from his face to the desk, and from the desk back again to his varying countenance; as if trying to decipher whether he had found time to examine the scattered contents of her chamber.—The confusion painted in Basil's face, was, however, just as likely to arise from her ungracious mode of reception, as from consciousness of having indulged a prying curiosity.

The entrance of Hannah with the rich old-fashioned tea-service, which having placed on the table, she was hurrying away again, encouraged young Annesley to ask permission to visit the bedside of the poor old invalid, before the night became too far advanced to admit of disturbing him.

"Dorcas is with him night and day. He has all the attendance he requires," was Lady Annesley's frigid reply.

"But as a satisfaction to myself, and, if I may be permitted to say so, to *him*. Poor Nicholas was always so fond of me," pleaded Basil.

"He is past deriving pleasure from the presence even of those who are dearest to him," persisted Lady Annesley. "Let me beg you rather to ascertain that your things have been safely deposited in your room by the person who accompanied you. Yonder poor girl is scarcely strong enough to supply the place of him we are about to lose."

Basil accepted the hint. Nothing more likely to injure the candour of an ingenuous heart, than the undue possession of a secret. For the first time in his life, he attributed a stratagem to his mother; convinced that she was desirous to get rid of him, in order to replace the mysterious portrait in its accustomed concealment.

He was so far justified in his suspicions, that, on his return to the tea-table, refreshed by purification from London soot and the dust of the road, a glance towards the ebony desk convinced him that the picture had disappeared. He fancied, however, that his mother had detected even that momentary scrutiny; for her deportment was, if possible, more ungracious than before.

At any other moment, he would have attempted to dissipate her ill-humour by allusions to the news of the day, and the tittle-tattle of London life. But though excluded from the chamber of death, he could not forget that, at the distance of a few chambers from the one they occupied, lay an aged man, endeared to both by long association, and about to appear in the presence of his Maker.

This indeed was a sufficient excuse for the singular mood of Lady Annesley. In many persons grief takes the form of anger. A proud spirit, unwilling to display itself covered with dust and ashes, uplifts its head with unbecoming pride, in order to conceal that temporary humiliation.

As every stroke tells against a gamester in his vein of ill fortune, whatever topic was selected by Basil to dispel the embarrassment of that painful *tête-à-tête*, seemed to aggravate her still further against him.

Lady Annesley, as if desirous of promoting desultory conversation,

adverted to the young nephew of the Duke of Rochester, who had recently entered his regiment.

"I was formerly acquainted with his father, and uncle," said she, carelessly.

"His father is dead," observed Basil; "his uncle were perhaps better in his grave. He is in the jaws of perdition,—ruined soul, body, and estate;—a victim to play, with his fine fortune melting away in the grasp of the Jews."

At that moment, an impulse of compunction peculiar to generous hearts, brought before him the liberal conduct of A. O., and the consciousness of his own obligations; and without reflecting on the singular effect such an outburst must produce on Lady Annesley, who had no clue to the origin of his opinions, he suddenly veered round, and began expressing his contempt of the existing prejudices against that contemned class of the community;—citing every advantageous opinion or example ever adduced in favour of the people after God's own heart, from Cumberland and Miss Edgeworth, back to the classic authorities of the Judaic world.

A sudden flush overspread the habitually pallid face of Lady Annesley. Her spirit seemed chafing within her. At last, she spake with her tongue.

"I can readily understand," said she, with undisguised bitterness, "that the follies and vices of London, and the companionship into which they may have forced you, may have done something towards relaxing the principles in which you have been reared, and the proud instincts of honourable descent. But I did *not* suppose that a few thousands conceded by these wretched unbelievers, these heirs of perdition, gilded over like the molten calf till even Christian kings fall down and worship, would so soon have obliterated in your heart the prejudice common to all ages, all nations, and consequently respectable even as a prejudice. For my part, I loathe a Jew,—I am proud to declare that I *loathe* a Jew. Apart from the crime which stamped them with eternal condemnation, I detest their principles, I detest their practices. Wherever there are Jews, *there* is narrowness of mind, foulness of body, baseness of heart. They are a filthy people. Even as of old they bought with thirty pieces of silver the blood of their Redeemer, would they still chaffer for the heart's blood of the innocent. I tell you, Basil, I loathe them; and those who induced you to entertain a contrary opinion, deceived *you* as much as they injured *me!*"

The eyes of young Annesley were now fixed upon his mother with unqualified amazement. She, usually so mild, so serene, so low-voiced, so indifferent to the things of this world, to be excited by so slight a cause into this violent diatribe!—In the house of death, too;—with her aged servitor expiring almost within hearing.

Basil was awe-struck. He could not help surmising for a moment, that his beloved mother's reason might be affected by her attendance on the death-bed of her faithful old domestic.

"Believe me, dearest mother," said he, "I never heard you accused of any partiality for these maligned people. My inclination in their favour is a weakness arising from peculiar circumstances of a nature wholly personal."

"You *have* heard it?" cried Lady Annesley, unsubdued by his deprecation. "Do not add deceit to the audacity of attempting to invade the sacredness of my thoughts and feelings.—You *have* heard it!"

Terrified and grieved, young Annesley was about to enter upon his own disculpation. But as he advanced nearer towards his mother, he perceived that, overcome by the violence of her emotions, she had thrown herself back in her chair, and covered her face with her hands to conceal a frantic burst of tears.

Basil Annesley stood transfixed. It was the first time in his life he had ever seen his mother shed a tear!—

CHAPTER V.

Oh! mother—yet no mother.—SAVAGE.

"I HAD no intention of offending you, dearest mother," whispered Basil, when at length the subsiding of Lady Annesley's emotion seemed to justify his addressing her. But, to his surprise, on the withdrawal of her hands from her face to enable her to reply, her countenance had so completely resumed its usual rigidity, that all apology appeared superfluous. He attempted to take into his own one of the hands which had been screening those stern features; but it was obstinately fixed to her side.

"Believe me I had no intention of offending you," reiterated the young man, with earnest affection.

"Your excuses are a deeper offence than your indiscretion," replied Lady Annesley, in a harsh voice. "Your coming hither at all, has disturbed and thwarted me;—your conduct, now you are here, seems scarcely likely to reconcile me to your disobedience."

"Dearest mother!" cried Basil, stung by her severity out of his habitual deference and reserve, "you well know that your wishes are laws to me,—that I would sacrifice my happiness here and hereafter for your sake—"

"You are a large talker, Basil," interrupted Lady Annesley. "It is easy to protest,—easy to undertake services or sacrifices that can never be required of you. I requested you to abstain for the present from visiting the Grange.—Yet, you are here."

"I have already explained my motives," cried Basil, eagerly, "and pledged myself to immediate departure. If you wish it, mother, I will not wait till to-morrow—I will be off this very night. I can return to Lyndhurst; I can sleep at the inn. It is late.—The fellow who brought my baggage will scarcely be persuaded to return for it to-night. But early in the morning he shall be here, in time to enable me to start by the first coach."

Lady Annesley gazed a moment on the young and handsome face, on which such earnest sincerity was at that moment painted.

"Abide here to-night, my son," said she calmly, at the close of her scrutiny. "Another time, be more acquiescent."

"But I assure you, dearest mother, I should be well accom-

modated at Lyndhurst; and it may be as well to be there in waiting for the coach. I—"

"You will remain *here*, if you please!" interrupted Lady Annesley, in a cold and positive tone. "It is, as you observe, late; and the hour is unseemly for traversing the fields. The forest produces inconvenient neighbours, and dangerous company. The illness of my poor Nicholas proceeded, in the first instance, from a rough encounter on the road, one evening at dusk, on his return from conveying my letters to the post. I pray you, therefore, to remain here—"

"Certainly, if such be your desire."

"But not the less to hasten your departure at an early hour to-morrow. I will even take my leave of you to-night, Basil; for I must watch through the small hours, to enable poor Dorcas to take some sleep. I shall probably retire to rest just as you are stirring."

"As you please, dear mother," replied the dispirited young man, perceiving by her tone and gesture that these words implied dismissal for the night. "If you must indeed watch by the poor old man, I can understand that my presence must be importunate. But if you would only permit me, for this one night to take your place—"

"I have already expressed my pleasure on that point."

"At least, since you judge me too restless or careless for a nurse, (though you used to praise my care when I waited upon yourself during your attack of ague last year,) at least, there is Hannah to relieve you. Hannah is a stout, active, trusty girl, who would be none the worse for wanting, occasionally, a night's rest."

"She is *not* to be trusted. The young are ever inefficient watchers. With *them* 'the spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak.'—*They* have no distracting thoughts to keep their senses on the alert,—no cares to render them wakeful. They lay their heads on their pillows, and are in heaven till morning; and when they attempt the watcher's chair of penance, fancy their heads upon their pillows."

"If it be on that account you refuse my services," observed Basil, "I promise you, mother, that I have cares enough in my keeping, both of my own and other people, to keep me as wakeful as you could desire."

Again did Lady Annesley intently examine her son.

"You have no right to have cares of your own," said she; "and I advise you to be cautious how you become care-keeper for others. Your own turn will come. You have your share, Basil, in the typical inheritance of the sons of Adam,—the thorns which the earth was condemned to bring forth in punishment for the sin of our common parents. Such is the commandment of a jealous God!"

"I am more in fear of the penalty entailed upon my head by the fall of man," observed Basil, in a low voice, "than of having to answer for any sins of my *own* parents. But, as I said before, mother, if it be because you think me a sleepy-head that you deny me the pleasure of relieving your guard for this one night—"

"Once and for all, it is *not* on that account," said Lady Annesley, in an angry voice. "You were not wont, Basil, to be so pertinacious or so inquisitive. Amend the fault before we meet again; and show me that it is already repented by immediate compliance with my requests. Retire to rest, that you may be stirring the earlier. —Yonder is your bed-candle.—Good night."

Basil Annesley was conscious at that moment of a choking sensation in his throat, such as he had often experienced in childhood, when unjustly chidden. He remained a moment doubtful whether to fling himself at Lady Annesley's feet, and implore a more motherly entreatment; or stand forth reprovingly in all the energy of his youthful sense of her injustice, and hazard a still stronger appeal.

But that momentary pause recalled to his generous mind that his mother was harassed by fatigue, and careworn by the danger of her faithful servant; and he determined, as his filial piety had so often determined before, to submit and be patient.

After imprinting a kiss upon the slender hand which, if no longer obstinately withheld from him, was far from encouragingly held forth, he took the candle from the marble table, hastily lighted it, and silently withdrew, eager to give vent, in his own chamber, to the emotions contending in his heart.

But on his arrival there, he was struck by the order in which his things were laid out for him, and the more than usual care with which his comfort had been provided for.—Hoping to obtain an interview with old Dorcas, and entreat her influence with her lady to obtain him his share in the family vigils, he strove to discover some deficiency entitling him to ring for assistance.—Impossible!—everything was in its place—everything forthcoming. The kettle was beside the fire,—the boot-jack and slippers beside the chair.

"I can, at all events, summon Hannah, on pretence of wishing to be called before daybreak," said he, musing.

Having fulfilled his intention, he anxiously awaited the tap at the door, announcing the usual assiduous attendance of the active damsel. But no knock was heard,—no Hannah made her appearance; and when, weary of waiting, and having twice poked up the fire into a blaze to beguile his impatience, he ventured to ring again, the same silence prevailed. Nothing was audible but the shrill whistling of the wind in the old corridor; and now and then, a squeak and scuffle among the merry mice, coursing each other by moonlight in the deserted chambers above.

A third time did Basil make the attempt, which, he trusted, would summon poor Dorcas for a moment from the chamber of the invalid which lay at the extremity of an adjoining passage. But, lo! when, instead of the expected tap, the door revolved slowly upon its hinges, his mother, not her attendant, stood before him.

"Are you in want of anything, that you thus disturb the house?" said she, gravely. "I thought I had been careful in supplying all you could possibly need to-night."

"I merely rang for Hannah, to say that—"

"Hannah has retired to bed, and Dorcas is retiring," persisted Lady Annesley. "When you released me just now, I took up my

post for the night beside the sick man; satisfied that, having carefully arranged your room with my own hands previous to joining you at tea, no further attendance would be wanting. Is there anything I can procure or do for you?"

"Could I have entertained the least idea, dearest mother, that you had given yourself all this trouble on my account——"

"I ask you again, is there anything further I can do for you?—Be quick!—My presence is required elsewhere."

"Nothing on earth."

"You rang, then, to summon the girl for a needless attendance?"

"I rang to request I might be called at the earliest hour of morning, to secure my obedience to your orders," replied Basil, proudly.

"Did you suppose that I should leave the hour of your rising to chance? Be satisfied!—You shall be called betimes. And now let me entreat you to abstain from further disturbance. You are in the house of sickness,—perhaps to become, before morning, the house of death."

Basil stood confounded at the unmerited harshness of his mother; and did not recover his self-possession for many minutes after Lady Annesley quitted the room. His heart was now sorer than before. He was more than ever stung by her severity, on finding it coupled with the vigilance of mother-love which had presided over the arrangements of his chamber. He must indeed be a grievous offender, since the affections of her heart were thus controllable by the sternness of her displeasure.

He now flung himself, despondingly, into a seat before the fire; and placing his feet upon the old-fashioned fender, and fixing his eyes upon the heavy brass dogs supporting the crackling logs upon the hearth, tried to feel himself at home. Strange how often the habitation familiar to us from infancy seems less familiar and less a home than the dwelling of the stranger. For the life and soul of him, Basil could *not* feel at home. He kept dreading the re-entrance of his mother for further reprehension; yet equally feared to bolt the door against her return, lest she should take offence at this seeming defiance. His very thoughts, under the influence of such impressions, did not seem secure from her intrusion. There were subjects on which he felt afraid to ponder. There were people he dared not pass in review or recal with the tenderness of memory, lest he should suddenly find the severe eye of Lady Annesley fixed upon his face, prepared to scan and scrutinize his feelings.

Most people are conscious of the sort of disburdenment of thought and sentiment apt to follow a transition from cities to the country. In the quiet of the first night spent out of town, disjointed images reconnect themselves; ideas and conclusions assume a regular train of thought; and Basil experienced all the desire of one suddenly enfranchised from the rabble and tumult of London, to dwell upon the course of recent events, and determine more considcringly what portion of his loves and friendships had been lavished in vain.

But it was no moment for such reveries. The dread of his mother's reappearance was potent over his mind, as over that of a child

the terror of a midnight apparition.—His thoughts were paralyzed. He could not even *feel* freely at that moment.

Wondering surmises hastily traversed his brain with regard to the mysterious portrait, and the still more mysterious emotions betrayed by his mother. Painfully pleasing visions flitted before his eyes of the bright form of Esther—his own Esther—his beloved Esther. But just as her eyes seemed gazing into his, the creaking of the wainscot seemed to indicate, from without, the approach of Lady Annesley; and the light of the fire appeared a reflection of that which had recently brightened the chamber from the taper in the hand of his mother.

The night was beginning to be tempestuous. Before the moon set, the winds were rising; beating menacingly against the crazy walls of the old Grange, as if to demand how they had dared so long to withstand the attacks of time; and roaring in the vast chimney, as though to inquire the meaning of an unwonted inmate in that chamber.

By degrees, the storm rose in fierceness. The shrill whistling of the winds became a shriek; and arrowy discharges of sleet were heard sharply against the windows.

Under this influence, the spirit of Basil became more and more depressed. He was incapable of even the sensations of comfort imparted by a warm fireside, when listening to a storm without. He was an intruder in his mother's house—he was an alien from his mother's heart. Lady Annesley had secrets in which she rejected his participation,—cares, for which she disdained his solace.

To sit and gaze upon the glowing embers, however, afforded little consolation. It is when perplexed, not when afflicted, that we delight in fire-gazing. At length, the warmth which imparted no pleasure, seemed to inspire energy: for, suddenly starting up, he recalled to mind that the surest way to win his mother's confidence, was implicit obedience; and that, in order "early to rise," it was expedient to adopt the precept of "early to bed."

Midnight had already struck, previous to this good resolution; and ere his head had hollowed his pillow, the first hour of morning was sternly announced by the crazy old clock gracing the stair-head adjoining his chamber. It was unlikely, however, that he should hear the striking of a second, for already he was growing drowsy. His cares assumed a less definite pressure. The shape of Esther hovered less visibly before his closing eyes. Easier in spirit—easy in position,—he forgot maternal oppression and his subservience to a Jew, and fell quietly asleep.

His dreams, however, soon became unquiet. The expressive countenance portrayed by the miniature, (its handsome features commingled with those of Abednego Osalez,) seemed to mock and perplex his slumbers. Again, did his stern mother harshly reproach him; and strange voices seemed to mingle in mockery with her upbraidings.

He woke—he started from his feverish pillow. The strange voices were easily explained by the fitful moaning of the storm, which now appeared to sink into the sobbing of despair,—now to rise into shrieks of eldritch laughter. But there were no faces

around him to explain the visions of his disquiet. He was alone, with scarcely a gleam of light emanating from the dying embers on the hearth.

In another moment, he would have sunk down again upon his pillow, and fallen once more asleep, but that his disturbed imagination conceived an idea that the wailing which at first appeared that of the storm without, might, after all, be the expression of human suffering;—the plaintive cries of the dying man.—His mother might be exposed to the dreadful task of watching alone over an agonized deathbed.

He rose, and flung on his dressing-gown. Displeased as Lady Annesley might be at his presuming to disobey her commands, he would not suffer this. He would insist upon sharing her vigils. Softly opening the door, he proceeded, without a light, along the corridor, hoping to attain the door of the apartment appropriated to the poor old man. But, as he advanced, he became again persuaded that those mournful moanings really proceeded from the gusts of the storm. Nay, as he approached nearer the chamber of sickness, even these had fallen into such momentary stillness, that the beating of his own heart became audible as he recognised in the dead of night the stern voice of Lady Annesley reciting aloud the prayers for the sick, beside the bed of the dying man.

Retreating in haste to his chamber, as if unworthy to share a task so solemn, Basil was soon in bed; and the momentary chill arising from his exploit seemed to have restored the power of slumber; for he now slept heavily, and long.—*How* long, he knew not: but a pale grey light was stealing into the chamber, when again he opened his eyes.

And *this* time, he could not deceive himself. A face *was* bending over him, and peering into *his*. Not, however, the ideal face of Esther. There was no mistaking it for any one of the visages which had haunted his dreams; or even for the rosy face of the damsel who, Lady Annesley had informed him, was charged to rouse him at daybreak. It was an aged face, withered by time and sorrow.

"Master Basil, I say,—*dear* Master Basil," gasped his mother's venerable waiting-woman, "I have been calling you these five minutes."

"Thanks, Dorcas, many thanks.—I fear I have been sleeping heavily.—Send me my shaving-water, and I will be up directly. Is it late,—or am I in time?"—

"Hush, Sir;—speak softly, I beg of you. My lady has not been an hour in bed; and having forced her to take an anodyne draught after the dreadful night she has been passing, I am grievously afraid of having her waked.—Nothing more injurious, Master Basil, than being disturbed when opiates are taking effect; and my poor lady has not slept till now these five nights past."

"I will be very careful, Dorcas. It had been already settled that she was not to be disturbed for my departure. I will dress immediately, and shall have left the house without her knowing it."

"It is not *that*, Sir.—I do not *wish* you to go, Master Basil.—I want your help, Sir; I am in great trouble,—sore trouble and dis-

tress!"—faltered the old waiting-woman, drawing her hand across her eyes. "I am inclined to thank God for your being here, Sir;—and yet fear my lady will never forgive me for having even mentioned the subject to you.—But indeed, and indeed, Sir, such scenes are too much for her. It is as much as her life is worth—to wake her at this moment. Yet, indeed, Sir, I cannot manage him alone."

"Are you in need, then, of my assistance for Nicholas, Dorcas?" cried young Annesley. "I will be with you in a moment—"

"But you are not aware, Sir,—I must first apprize you—your kind, good heart, Master Basil, would be too much shocked—"

"My dear Dorcas, it is not the first time I have seen a dying man. My professional duties sometimes lead me to a hospital."

"But not to a death-bed like this. It is a hard thing even for *me*, who have passed through enough and to spare of the sorry sights of this world, to see my poor old fellow-servant in such a condition.—But for *your* young eyes, Master Basil—"

"Only give me a moment to throw on my clothes—"

"I am not without hope, Sir, that, startled by your coming, whom he has not seen for months, Nicholas may so far recover his reason as to know you; and then, perhaps, he might compose himself, and be quieted without recourse to violent means—"

"To *violent* means?" interrupted Basil. "Is the poor fellow, then, bereft of his reason?"

"He has had repeated attacks of delirium throughout his illness. Yesterday morning, the professional gentleman who comes from Southampton to visit him, found it necessary to place him under restraint. Towards evening he became calmer; and my lady insisted upon releasing him from the strait-waistcoat. Infirm as he is—feeble—dying—she says his violence is merely that of words, and that he can do no serious injury to himself or others."

"Gracious Heaven! My mother has been exposed, then, alone, throughout the night, to the violence of a lunatic."

"Nicholas was never known, even in his worst paroxysms, Master Basil, to lift his hand, or even his voice, against my lady. Her presence seems to have a soothing power over him, beyond the coercion of the physician."

"But why, Dorcas, why not tell me all this last night?"

"I was sent to bed by my lady, Sir, tired and exhausted with struggling against him, without so much as an intimation of your arrival; and I am convinced, that, after so anxiously keeping you away from the Grange lest you should witness this mournful scene, my lady was in hopes you would be off to London without obtaining any suspicion of the matter."

"How strange!" faltered young Annesley.

"My lady loves you too well, Master Basil, to bear your being unnecessarily troubled."

"But herself, Dorcas?"

"My lady is *used* to trouble—"

"My dear, dear mother!"

"Show your affection, Sir, by lending me your assistance, and securing her a few hours' sleep: she will wake refreshed and com-

forted. For unless I can prevail upon you to remain, I have not courage to undertake him till the doctor comes."

"Basil hastily and anxiously accomplished his toilet. He was soon at the door from which he had so timidly retreated in the dead of night.

On entering the chamber, he perceived Dorcas stationed on one side the bed; and, hidden within the curtains on the other, weeping and trembling, the stout servant-girl who had been left in charge of the maniac during her companion's absence. The grey light of dawn dimly penetrated the scene; falling on the white head of the venerable sufferer, who was propped with pillows, and staring around him with the ghastly fixedness characteristic of aberration of intellect.

"Do not be afraid of approaching him, Sir: he is quite harmless!" said Dorcas, with the bluntness of a coarse mind, on seeing her young master hesitate beside the door, impressed by the patriarchal aspect of the old man, whose hoary beard had been many weeks unshorn. "As I said just now, the surprise might do him good."

"My poor Nicholas!" faltered young Annesley, who had by this time reached the bed.

"Who called me?" demanded the patient, in a hollow voice.

"I am grieved to hear you have been so ill, Nicholas," persisted Basil, avoiding a direct reply, with a view to determine his power of recognition.

Instead of answering, the old man fixed his glassy eyes upon the person who thus unexpectedly presented himself; and for some moments did not vary the steadfastness of his gaze. At length, a gradual ray of intelligence seemed to brighten that soulless stare.

"I know you *now*!" said he in a low voice. "I know you, and tell you to be gone. What are you doing here?—Must there be more blood upon your hand?—Has not my lord expressly bidden us spurn you from his gate?—But there needed no bidding of *his*—I would have done it untold!—Even *I* would not witness the shame of my young lady!"

"My poor Nicholas, compose yourself!" said Basil, in a soothing voice, bending kindly towards him.

"Your *poor* Nicholas!" shouted the maniac, at the top of his broken voice, causing young Annesley to start back.—"How *dare* you call me your poor Nicholas?—How *dare* you attempt to cajole me?—Away with you,—away, Jew!—I *know* you, I tell you. When first your accursed gold induced me to do your bidding, I thought you a gentleman,—I thought you a *man!*—and now I spit upon you as a false and unbelieving Jew. Away, I say, or there is strength yet in the old man's gripe to tear you limb from limb!"

"For God's sake, Mr. Annesley, Sir, get away from him!" screamed the girl, who, in the danger of another, lost sight of her own. "He will be the death of you, Sir!"—

"He shall not go,—I have him fast!" cried the maniac, grasping the arm of the unresisting young man.

"Indeed, Master Basil, it will be safer to leave the room," cried Dorcas, becoming terrified in her turn.

"Basil?—*what* Basil?—ay, ay, another of her tricks. She wants

to impose him upon my lord as his grandson—but she cannot deceive *me*. I am not yet so old, or so blind, as not to discover him through all his disguises; and from the moment he attempted to take the life of my master's son, I swore his own should not be safe if he came hither again.—And now I have caught you,—as usual—as usual, stealing into the house like a thief in the dark, when others are asleep—others suffering and weeping—ay, weeping tears of blood. My poor, poor young lady!"

Basil Annesley was now becoming really intimidated; not by the sense of his own danger, but by the dread of obtaining surreptitious insight into the secrets of his mother. The word "Jew,"—the allusion to blood,—to family sorrow,—to family disgrace,—caused his own to thrill within his veins.

"Compose yourself, my poor old friend," faltered he, in an altered voice, without attempting to disengage his arm from the grasp of the lunatic. "Look at me, Nicholas.—Recal me to your mind.—Remember little Basil—remember Basil Annesley!"—A sort of howl instantly burst from the infuriated patient,—a howl terminating in a burst of frenetic laughter.

"ANNESLEY, forsooth!"—cried he. "Poor fool, poor fool;—poor cover to shame,—poor blind, blind dupe. Annesley?—If your name be Annesley, again I say, away with ye!—Go hide yourself in the grave, as your father did before you. He said nothing but death could efface such dishonour;—a violent death—a bloody death. But the drops he shed in obtaining it, young man, wrought not half the anguish in the heart they burst from, that the tears of his repentent widow have wrung out of the depths of her own. Away with ye, I say again, and hide yourself,—child of the foulest father and guiltiest mother that ever called down upon the head of their offspring the judgments of GOD."

Basil Annesley shuddered as he listened. The trembling fingers of the delirious sufferer still griped his arm. But it was not their feverish hold which caused his heart to quail. A hand was upon his shoulder: his mother stood beside him!—

Disturbed from her slumbers by the dreadful cry uttered by her distracted charge, Lady Annesley had risen in haste, and hurried, in her night-dress, to his chamber.

She arrived just in time to overhear the terrible revelations which had driven every tinge of colour from the cheeks of her son!

CHAPTER VI.

> Youth at the prow, and Pleasure at the helm,
> Regardless of the sweeping whirlwind's sway,
> Which, hushed in grim repose, expects its evening prey.
>
> GRAY.

FEW sunnier or pleasanter mansions in the metropolis, than the one in Arlington-street, inhabited by the Maitland family; overlooking the Green-park, across a trim little garden belted with lilac-bushes and evergreens; but containing within, a scene of brighter seeming than the gayest London thoroughfare can supply.

Impossible to conceive a stronger contrast than between the stern retreat of Sir Bernard Annesley's widow, and the brilliant abode of Lord Maitland's wife:—the one grim and gloomy as her own care-crazed destinies;—the other, radiant with gilding and varnish—porcelain and or-molu,—musical instruments, and fashionable caricatures;—everything that modern luxury can supply to dazzle the eyes of Time with their senseless glitter.

The Maitlands were, in most respects, showy people,—heartless people,—people of the day; such as might be expected in a family where the father is on the turf, and the only duty of the mother's life not discharged by proxy, are those of a patroness of Almack's.

Lady Maitland's daughters were the production of the governess; —Lord Maitland's sons, the work of Eton and Sandhurst;—and, considering the superficial second-nature derivable from such sources, the young people were amiable enough. They did no harm in the world. It was not their own fault that they had never been taught to do good. Their town residence was one of those pleasant houses which constitute a charming lounge for London idlers. Chat, scandal, and music were always waiting till called for at the Maitlands'.

Before her daughters grew up, her ladyship had adopted the system of encouraging morning visitors to assist her in frittering away her leisure; and there appeared no pretext for suddenly opposing an obstacle to the tide of busy idleness she had brought upon herself. It was impossible to say frankly—"I no longer desire young men to frequent my house, because my daughters are now young women." The thing was, therefore, suffered to go on; for the spoiled child of the family, John Maitland, the eldest son, was too destitute of rational pursuits to dispense with constant society. John hated to be alone with his parents. John was in the Guards—a fixture in London; and would have made himself a considerable nuisance to the family with whom he hated to be left alone, unless his pleasure had been duly studied.

His brother officers had, consequently, the run of the sunny drawing-room in Arlington-street. As the dowager-colonel, old Carrington, often observed, "There would have been no getting through the winter in town, without those Maitlands!"—a comprehensive popularity fatal to young ladies on their preferment. It is not often marriages take place in a family, where the daughters are only generalized as those "So-and-So's."

"What the deuce has become of Annesley?" demanded John Maitland of Captain Blencowe, who was sitting with them in Arlington-street the day after Basil's departure from Barlingham Grange.

"Out of town," was the careless reply.

"I fancied that most of the holiday parties were broken up?" observed Laura Maitland, whose notion of a country life consisted in a gay mansion, where thirty people sit down daily to dinner; in a hunting county, with meets on the lawn—or with billiards and private theatricals where the sporting is indifferent.

"Annesley is not gone to join a *party*. Annesley goes into the

country to be privately flogged with his mother's apron-string," replied Captain Blencowe, jocosely.

"To be *tied* to it, I suppose you mean," observed John Maitland, who was sealing notes at a writing table, where his mother had been dictating invitations.

"I don't think she likes him well enough to secure his company by coercive means," retorted Blencowe. "I never saw so cold or harsh a woman as Lady Annesley."

"But where does one meet her, Captain Blencowe?" inquired Lucy Maitland, from the embroidery-frame at which she sat listening.

"Lady Maitland may, perhaps, have met her five-and-twenty years ago. In *our* time she has lived the life of a recluse."

"Then how came *you* to see her?"

"I did *not* come. On the contrary, she came to see *me*. When Basil had that attack of fever last year, and was so near dying, I wrote to Lady Annesley, who hurried up to town. I was officiating as his nurse, and vow to heaven that the sight of her severe countenance and mourning dress, from morning till night, made me almost as ill as himself. After sitting up with her half a night, I fancied I had been in the company of one of the familiars of the Inquisition!"

"By Jove, Blencowe, how you do romance!" cried John Maitland. "To conjure an ugly old woman, in a black bombazeen gown into a familiar of the Inquisition!"

"How could I tell into what she might conjure *me?* She had all the air of a practitioner of the black art. However, with all Lady Annesley's apparent harshness, if she be half so good a mother as nurse, Basil can have no fault to find with her."

"But *does* he find fault?" inquired Lucy Maitland, with interest.

"Basil seldom finds fault with anything or anybody, for he is the best-natured fellow in the world. I suspect he would sooner arraign the commander-in-chief himself, or the commander-in-chief's commander-in-*chiefissimo*, than allude slightingly to his mother. Annesley is almost superstitious in his filial devotion."

John Maitland looked round from the writing-table with a significant gesture towards Blencowe, as if to implore silence on so delicate a topic in presence of his own mother; while Lucy murmured something over her *crochet* work that sounded very like commendation.

"I am sadly afraid young Annesley is likely to make a fool of himself," sententiously interposed Colonel Carrington, who was in the habit of establishing himself, his half hour *per diem*, in Lady Maitland's drawing-room, as much as a matter of routine as he swallowed his morning dose of Gregory's mixture, or his evening digestion pill; fancying that, because the boys of the regiment were amused there, he must be amused there too; for it had become a matter of course for every ensign, on entering the regiment, to fall in love with one or other of Maitland's sisters; and if of sufficient fortune or connections, to be admitted as a lounger in Arlington-street.

If the Dowager-Colonel formed the same pretensions as his younger and more acceptable brother officers, he was admitted with very different views. Old Carrington, the butt of the subalterns at mess, was also the butt of the Maitlands' drawing-room; nor did they seem aware how many people accept it as a sure indication of ill-nature and ill-breeding in a circle, to *have* an established butt as a stimulant to its attempts at wit.

One of the many ways in which the old beau lent himself to the fulfilment of their purposes, was by his jealousy of every good-looking young fellow who joined the regiment. Till Wilberton came, Annesley had been the object of his antipathy; and Colonel Carrington still rarely neglected an opportunity of attacking Basil.

On the present occasion, finding that no notice was taken of the first discharge of his battery, he hazarded a second fire.

"I am afraid," said he, more articulately, "young Annesley is likely to make a fool of himself, which I sincerely regret. Let Lady Annesley be as disagreeable as she may, Basil is an only son, and the son of a gallant soldier. I should be sorry to see his mother's old age rendered miserable by his ruin."

"In what does Basil make himself a greater fool than the rest of us?" demanded Maitland, (Captain Blencowe being too much engrossed by Lucy's work-basket to take up the cudgels in defence of his absent friend.) "We are all tolerable asses, one way or other. For my part, I look upon Annesley as the Solon of the battalion."

"Then give me leave to observe, that you say very little for the rest of us!" said the Colonel, crabbedly, settling his long throat in an old-fashioned stock.

"Pretty nearly as much as you deserve," gracelessly retorted young Maitland. "For instance, he does not ruin himself in perfumes and cosmetics, like Loftus, for the cultivation of whiskers that will not grow, and the dispersion of freckles that *will*; or like Wilberton, in building cabs and Broughams for the pleasure of seeing those eternal crests and ciphers of his emblazoned in some new fashion. He does not set Graham's in an uproar, night after night, by his bad play, like Blencowe yonder, who is whispering so low to Lucy that I conclude neither of them hear what we are saying."

"Did you speak to *me*?" inquired Captain Blencowe, suddenly starting up.

"Nor does he, like you, my dear Colonel," persisted Maitland, "amuse the figurantes at rehearsal, by the stiff-jointed deliberation with which he stalks out of the way when they are clearing the stage for action."

Colonel Carrington was, just then, troubled with so severe a fit of coughing, that he heard not a syllable of this apostrophe.

"You seem to have got your winter cough again, Colonel Carrington?" said Laura Maitland, with pretended solicitude. "You should try some Arabic lozenges."

"Nonsense—lozenges!" interrupted her brother. "Carrington's cough proceeds from asthma. It is a very serious thing to trifle with a chronic asthma!"

"I have told you a hundred times, Maitland, that it is nothing

of the sort!" pettishly interrupted the Dowager-Colonel. "Cannot a man take cold without having an habitual asthma?—*You* are, in fact, the cause of my catarrh, by throwing up the window at the Club, with an east wind blowing in our faces, to shout to Harman in his cab about the issue of the pigeon-match. It would not have hurt him to get out, or *you* to *go* out, rather than run the chance of giving cold to twenty of your friends."

"And aggravating the habitual asthma of the twenty-first.—Well, well, my dear Colonel, I'm sorry I mentioned it. I know it *is* a delicate point, and the men know it is a delicate point, particularly on field-days, and in a high wind. However, many poor fellows in the prime of life are subject to gout and asthma.—Many besides yourself suffer from gout and asthma before they are fifty:—don't they, mother?"

"Have you finished sealing those notes, John?" demanded Lady Maitland, by way of motherly interference.

"All those that signify. All the elder sons and young baronets of decent estate. I left the younger brothers and Irish dowagers to the last, in case the seal should get too warm, and myself too *luke*warm, to escape the charge of slovenliness. We shall still do very well, however, for a 'Lady Maitland requests the honour of Lord George Rawdon's company to a small early party on Friday next.' If Rawdon were not a Lord George, I suppose we might give him a wafer at once."

"What was that you were saying about gout and asthma, Colonel Carrington?" demanded Lady Maitland, conceiving, in her turn, that it might be as well to change the conversation.

"I was saying," interposed the Colonel—choosing, for his own sake, to misunderstand her—"that it is a lamentable thing young Annesley should be making such a fool of himself."

"That is the third time you have repeated yourself, Carr, my fine fellow!" said young Maitland, completing the sealing of the *last* note; "so I see you are determined we shall ask questions. You sha'n't be kept in suspense any longer. How is Annesley likely to make a fool of himself—*when*—*where*?—Make haste.—*Say* your worst, and put him and *us* out of our pain."

"I don't understand you, Maitland," said the Colonel, again settling his head uneasily in his stock. "I know no more than yourself of his proceedings. The rehearsals I attend—*you* attend also;—and for once that *I* set foot in Graham's, you are there twenty times!"

"But is there anything that commits Mr. Annesley more than the rest of the world, in frequenting either of those places?" inquired Lucy Maitland, addressing her question directly to Captain Blencowe, as much as to say,—"If you love me, take the part of your friend!" which, *if* he loved her, he was the less likely to do.

"I trust not—being therein as great a delinquent as himself," rejoined Blencowe. "But those who want to hear Annesley abused, need only listen to Wilberton and Carrington; one of whom is jealous of him, and the other envious."

"Which of them is envious?" inquired Lucy Maitland, lookin archly up from her work

"The man with the least mind of the two; Envy being meaner than Jealousy."

Miss Maitlands hrugged her shoulders, as if to imply the slightness of mental distinction between the young Ensign and old Colonel.

"Wilberton is envious of Basil," resumed Captain Blencowe; "because he is luckier at tennis than himself. Carrington is jealous of him; because——. But you turn away, Miss Maitland. Have you no curiosity to learn why Carrington is jealous of him?"—

"None in the world!"

"Nor even any to ascertain what Carrington is evidently dying to tell," added Captain Blencowe, "concerning poor Annesley's modes and method of playing the fool?"

"Still less,—I have great faith in the judgment of a man so much older than myself as Colonel Carrington," replied Lucy, bitterly. "But it would require far more to persuade me that a person so universally liked in the world, and loved in the regiment, whom we see almost daily, and always in so reasonable a mood and with such gentlemanly habits and feelings—is disgracing himself."

"My dear Lucy, you are very severe. You forget to whom you are speaking," observed her brother, with mock gravity.

"I am speaking to three or four of the intimate friends of Mr. Annesley," persisted the young lady.

"We flatter ourselves, that, however grand that title may appear to *you*, we have higher qualifications," retorted John Maitland. "We flatter ourselves, (at least so the peerage entitles us,) that we are 'ALL honourable men.' We flatter ourselves, that we *all* 'play the fool,' as Carrington calls it, if not to our heart's content, to the content of our enemies—viz., to the heart's content of our intimate friends. You are consequently personal, Miss Lucy Maitland, *shamefully* personal, when you talk about Annesley's '*disgracing* himself,' because his friend yonder says he is playing the fool. Understand for the future, my dear little sister, that nobody disgraces himself now-a-days, whose name does not appear in the Saturday Gazette or the Sunday newspapers."

"Then Basil Annesley is safe, I suppose," said the old Colonel, spitefully, giving his head *this* time a shake in his stock, as violent as though he were trying the strength of the vertebræ—"for he is too insignificant, in point of fortune and family, to achieve either of those evils."

"I was sure you would claim exemption for him, Carr, on some friendly grounds or other!" cried John Maitland, laughing outright. "But take courage. Insignificant as we all are, no one knows at what honours we may arrive. The least people, as well as the greatest, pretend now-a-days to the distinction of bankruptcy. The fellow who supplies cigars to the door steps of the club, was threatening the other day to betake himself to Basinghall-street, if we did not square accounts with him; and I never feel certain, any Saturday night of the year, of not seeing the name of 'THOMAS JOHN LORD MAITLAND, horse dealer,' figuring in the list of private defaulters, which would be a bore, you know, on opera night!"

"Lord Maitland would not be the first *peer* of the realm who has *appeared* in the Gazette," observed Blencowe, accepting his friend's

arguments as a joke, by an attempt at rejoinder; for in a mansion so splendidly furnished, having three servants in gay liveries waiting in the hall, and a groom of the chamber on the stairs, it was impossible to treat it as earnest.

It is true he had heard it rumoured, that two of these domestics were bailiffs, in family liveries; exercising their guardianship in behalf of John Doe and Richard Roe, over the family plate. But the same scandal was astir of one or two other noble houses of his acquaintance, where he knew it to be groundless; and of all the "truths stranger than fiction" of fashionable life, few appear less credible to novices, than the facility of keeping up appearances, with a rent roll of twenty thousand a-year, on which thirty thousand a-year is owing.

It seemed impossible even to Blencowe—even to the old Colonel of so many years London experience,—that there could be any want of money in a house where the dinners were so excellent, the establishment so brilliant. Lady Maitland had her diamonds and her opera-box,—the girls their saddle-horses and French maids. The rooms in Arlington-street were bright with exotics,—the evening parties frequent,—the morning luncheons luxurious. No finer grapes or pine apples were eaten, no racier sherry drunk in London, than were to be found every day at three o'clock, at the service of the lounging associates of young Maitland.

Whatever was newest and prettiest in fashionable attire, was first worn by Lady Maitland and her daughters. Whatever appeared that was attractive in the way of books, music, work, gaudy annuals, or fashionable engravings was to be found on their table. They ordered everything without regard to expense,—as is usually the case with persons who order on credit. No wonder, therefore, that they had troops of friends and hosts of pleasant acquaintances:

> for men, like butterflies,
> Show not their mealy wings but to the summer;

and in a house where all was so decidedly summerish, the butterflies *called* men naturally abound.

On entering the doors in Arlington-street, when open for parties, they were saluted with the sound of music, the sparkling of lights, the blandishments of youth and beauty. Luxury was enthroned there in all her effulgence—a very Circe in her fatal charming!

Nevertheless, had the dull old colonel or smart young captain been clearer of observation, they must have noticed, that, at the incautious sally of her son, the brows of Lady Maitland suddenly contracted. But having dined with the Maitlands the preceding day,—admired the splendour of the family plate, and the number of racing-cups on the buffet, they had complimented Lord Maitland too sincerely on the excellence of his hock and claret, to treat otherwise than as an exquisite jest the idea of his appearing in the Gazette.

"What a cursedly stupid invention, mother, is this new taper-stand!" added John Maitland, after burning his fingers in attempt-

ing to put out the light with an extinguisher of silver filigree. "You really ought to obtain a premium from Falck and Barry, for trying to bring their stupid novelties into fashion."

"Considering that it was *you*, John, who broke the stand of old Sèvres which the one in your hand was bought to replace," said Lady Maitland, "the less you say on the subject the better!"

"Don't be in a rage, my dear good mother!" remonstrated the graceless guardsman. "Consider for a moment your obligation to me, for affording you a pretext for the purchase of a new bauble, the fifty-second, I rather think, in the course of the year. You are the Providence of the rococo shops. Emanuel would send here to inquire after your health, were two days to pass without your carriage having stopped at his door!"

"I wish you would not talk such nonsense," said Lady Maitland, really angry. "It is by these kind of assertions you persuade your father into a belief of my extravagance; when, if the truth were told, I might have purchased a service of old Sèvres, and dozens of filigree stands with the sum which——"

"Well, well, we are all silly enough in our way, it seems, as well as Basil Annesley," interrupted young Maitland, more delicate about the betrayal of his own weaknesses, than in discussing those of other people. "I don't pretend not to be extravagant. Like Othello's handkerchief—'I had it from my mother.'"

"You deserve to have a severe scolding from your mother, John," said his elder sister (rising from the table, where she was emblazoning with cobalt, vermilion, and gold escutcheons for an heraldic illustration of the baronial houses of England, to grace a costly album), fancying it was her brother's allusions which, at that moment drove Lady Maitland from the room; nor was it till ten minutes afterwards her ladyship made her re-appearance with a portion of the broken inkstand, to exhibit to Colonel Carrington the exquisite beauty of one of its groups of *bergères galantes*, that Laura discerned her mistake.

But Lady Maitland was mistaken also. Instead of obtaining sympathy from the old beau, she found him chin-deep in further scandal respecting Basil Annesley.

"I admit that Verelst is a clever artist," he was observing as she entered. "But the passion for *virtù* is not strong enough at Annesley's age, to account for his devoting hour after hour to the family of an obscure Jew."

"I don't believe Verelst to be a Jew," said Blencowe, coldly.

"His wife, at least, is a Jewess," said Carrington; "and so, doubtless, are his daughters. The girl for whom Annesley obtained admission into the choruses at the Opera was called Esther, and her sister's name is Salome."

"The great Newton's name was Isaac,—but I never heard that he was a Jew.—What's in a name?—a rose (or Esther), by any other name would smell as sweet!" cried John Maitland. "Faugh! give me an ounce of civet. Who would fancy we were talking of filthy Israelites?"

At that moment, Lady Maitland insisted upon exhibiting her fragment of Sèvres, which excited little interest with the Dowager-Colonel, who was preparing a new assault.

"Annesley's *protégé* did not have much success, I fancy?" said he, addressing young Maitland.

"As if you were not perfectly aware, my dear fellow, that she had not even the opportunity for failure. The poor girl was so terrified by the impudence of a set of old fellows—yourself, I fancy, among the rest—amateurs, as they call themselves, who used to stare her out of countenance at rehearsal, that, on the eve of her appearance in Otello, she was seized with a fever from mere affright; and was far nearer giving up the ghost than assisting in softening (in A minor) the hard heart of Signor Brabantio."

"I recollect now;—a footlight panic, as the theatrical people call it," said the old Colonel, with another nervous twist of the neck within his stock.

"No such thing.—Esther Verelst had not so much as a *glimpse* of the footlights," cried Blencowe, interfering. "She never even attended a dress rehearsal.—So far from Annesley having recommended her to the managers, as you suppose, or assert, I never saw a man more shocked than he was on recognising her in her shabby old brown pelisse among the chorus-singers. The poor girl, (who had been singing last year at the Ancient Concerts, and knew the importance to her family of doubling her salary,) had obtained an engagement unknown to any one;—little surmising the difference between an Ancient Concert singer, and a chorus girl of the King's Theatre, at half-a-guinea a week."

"Poor Esther,—she was far too good for a chorus girl," said John Maitland, with good-natured interest;—"too good a singer, and too good a girl——"

"She soon, however, found out her mistake: and it was *then* that Annesley protected her, and tried to get her engagement broken. Esther was not, however, to be so readily dispensed with: and nothing short of the utter incapacity produced by her dangerous illness would have softened in her favour that nether mill-stone. a managerial heart."

"And what has become of this poor girl?" demanded the elder Miss Maitland,—Lucy being too much interested in the question to venture the inquiry.

"*That* you had better inquire of Annesley, on his return to town," said the old beau; "for he never leaves her father's house."

"And who is her father?" persisted Laura Maitland.

"A foreign artist, whom Annesley picked up, when a boy, at some foreign university—Jena, or Göttingen,—or wherever he was brought up."

"Verelst was Basil Annesley's drawing-master, when a student at Heidelberg," said Blencowe, firmly; "and, like half the artists of half the countries in Europe, is a man of moderate means. He got into some political scrape at Heidelberg, and fled to this country:—so he says, at least. But all foreign refugees in England talk of political scrapes, as more popular here than any other. In England, he knew only Annesley. and another chap or two to whom he had given lessons at Heidelberg: and the first thing we heard of Verelst, was a raffle proposed at the Club for one of his pictures—(won, by the way, by Carrington,)—and a beautiful thing it was."

"Yes, I have been offered three times the upset price of that picture, by several engravers," said the Colonel, with an air of complacency; "but I never chose to part with it."

"As Verelst and his family are starving, you might, at least, have obtained him an order for a copy," observed John Maitland.

"In order that my own might never afterwards be considered an original?"

"What then?—You would have put a hundred guineas in the poor fellow's pocket, without taking *one* out of your own,—which you know, Carr, you would as soon part with, as with your life's blood!"

"On the contrary," retorted the Colonel—"I bought, last summer, a set of sporting sketches of Verelst, which had been previously offered to yourself, and rejected."

"Ay,—because you got them at half-price; whereas *I* had the decency to reject them, because, not having the money to pay for them, I thought I should be an ugly customer for a poor fellow like Verelst."

"Quite right!" interposed Lucy.

"But why did you never mention this artist or his works to *us*, John?" inquired her sister.

"Because young ladies ought not to have pocket-money enough to buy pictures," replied John Maitland;—"and to the minor relief of Missish Charity, a man like Verelst would never stoop. He has the soul of a genius, and the courage of a lion!"

"Which does not, however, appear to be shared by his family," observed Laura; "since you say that his daughter was too timid to sing at the Opera."

"Esther is, however, a bit of a lioness in her way," said Captain Blencowe, with a smile; adding, with a glance at the old colonel,—"But what chance has even a lioness, when opposed to a set of tigers?"

Miss Maitland did not choose to hear, or, at all events, to smile, as he expected.

"It seems to me, my dear John," said she, still remonstrating with her brother, "that the man, not too proud to give lessons to Mr. Annesley, need not be too proud to afford them to Laura Maitland. I *want* a drawing-master.—Mamma has promised me a drawing-master——"

"But how do you know, my dear, that this Verelst man is a competent master?"—interrupted Lady Maitland.

"Do you not hear, mamma, that Colonel Carrington has been offered three times the price of his picture?" observed Laura, less reverently than feelingly.

"A man may paint very well himself, and have great conceptions of his art," observed the old colonel, "who is incapable of imparting instruction to others."

"Very *sensibly* observed!" remarked Lady Maitland, who appeared to have no great leaning towards the indigent drawing-master.

"At all events, one might do something for the daughter," observed Lucy. "If she sang at the Ancient Concert last year,

she must understand her business. We have long been talking of getting up some quartettes with Colonel Loftus, and Sir James Doyle. Miss Verelst might be of material use to us. Supposing I write to engage her?"

"You are very easily interested, my dear Lucy, in Basil Annesley's *protégée!*" said her brother, with a shrug of the shoulders. "You are not half so good to mine.—I have two or three chorus-singers to recommend to you."

"Not the daughters of meritorious artists in distress," said his sister, with indignation.

"The 'meritorious' and 'distress' you have taken solely upon Blencowe's showing; who never tells truth but once a-week—and this is not his day. However, if you mean to oblige Annesley, who I know to be a vast favourite of yours, you will scarcely effect it by bringing Esther Verelst into contact with Colonel Loftus, or any other gentleman of the staring Carrington School. He would much rather let the whole family starve in decent privacy."

"It is easy for gentlemen of the prating Maitland School to talk lightly of *starving*," retorted his sister; "but I assure you, John—"

At that moment the butler having entered the room, whispered, more closely than is usual for butlers to whisper in drawing-rooms, a message to Lady Maitland.

"Tell him Lord Maitland is out," was her ladyship's audible reply.

"I have told him so repeatedly, already, my lady," was the butler's rejoinder. "He particularly wishes to know whether his lordship dines at home."

"Of course he does,—yet, stay—I really cannot tell," said her ladyship, apparently enlightened by second thoughts. "But if Lord Maitland does not dine at home, he dines at White's."

The butler left the room noiselessly, as every well-bred ghost and well-bred butler retreats from sight; and Laura Maitland again renewed her interrogations respecting Basil's Esther. "Was she handsome or ugly,—tall or short,—her voice a soprano or mezzo soprano?"—

"She is a monstrous pretty girl, with a monstrous pretty voice, I can tell you; or Annesley would not have worn himself out at elbows paying debts for her father," cried John, almost out of patience with her pertinacity.

"I never heard anything so impertinent," now burst from the lips of Lady Maitland, who was again colloquizing in whispers with the mysterious butler. "Tell him I *never* see people on business. If he calls to-morrow at breakfast, Wilson, (say Lord Maitland breakfasts at eleven,) he will be most likely to see him."

"I rather think *not*, my lady; for my lord particularly desired that this person might *never* be admitted to him," said the grave Mr. Wilson, with *malice prepense*, to avenge certain unexpiated wrongs of his own, upon her ladyship and her ladyship's daughters.

"Tell him what you are *desired!*" said Lady Maitland, in a haughty tone.

"I have done my best to send him away," said Wilson. "But he has stationed himself in the library, my lady, and will not leave

the house. He says it is essential (if my lord is *really* out) that he should have an audience of your ladyship."

"I shall certainly not expose myself to an interview with a stranger—a man of whom I know nothing," said Lady Maitland, with manifestly increasing agitation.

"What is all this, mother?" inquired John, who had now caught here and there a few words of the conversation.

"Merely that there is a person below, who insists upon seeing your father."

"Some impertinent fellow of a tradesman, I suppose, with a large account to make up, (they have always large accounts to make up!)—Well!—*we* insist too, Wilson. We insist upon his taking himself off. Lord Maitland is not, and Lady Maitland does not *choose* to be, at home."

"It is not a tradesman, sir," said the butler aloud, for the benefit of the party. "If it had been a tradesman, I should not have presumed to trouble her ladyship. The gentleman came in his own carriage, which is still at the door."

"My tailor always visits me in his Brougham," said Blencowe, "except when he brings his bill; then he comes in his chariot."

"If your tailor drives such a deuced fine pair of bloods as this fellow," said John Maitland, who, from the front drawing-room, had taken a survey, in the interim, of the equipage of the mysterious guest, which was waiting at the door, "he is not the tailor you take him for!"

"Go down and speak to him, John," said Lady Maitland, by this time reassured. "I dare say it is somebody out of Yorkshire, about electioneering business."

And for once,—moved, perhaps, by some latent curiosity of his own, to ascertain the proprietor of such a capital pair of horses, young Maitland exhibited the utmost alacrity of filial obedience.

When he had left the room, old Carrington, who was inquisitiveness itself, began to fidget in his stock to a degree that almost threatened dislocation to his ostrich-like throat. At one moment, he had been on the point of offering Lady Maitland to accompany her son. To assuage his restless curiosity concerning the pertinacious visitor, he had no resource but to fall once more upon the Verelsts, in the hope of picking a third course of scandal out of the remnants of the feast.

Just, however, as he was beginning,—"I am assured by Loftus that Verelst's second daughter—that beautiful Salome,"—he was again interrupted.

With a face pale as death, John Maitland rushed back into the room.

"Why could you not tell me at once, mother," said he, sinking into a chair, "that it was that infernal A. O.!"

CHAPTER VII.

Look through mine eyes with thine. True wife
Around my heart thine arms entwine.
My other dearer life in life,
Look through my very soul with thine!
Untouched with further shade of years
May those kind eyes for ever dwell;
For they have shed too many tears,
Dear eyes, since first I loved them well.

TENNYSON.

THE humblest hovel of a village acquires temporary distinction from the blossoming of some fine old honeysuckle investing its crumbling walls with beauty and fragrance; and even into the miserable lodging of a gloomy city, momentary brightness may be infused by the chance introduction of a summer flower, whose rich perfumes bring tidings of a happier world.

So was it with the humble abode of Verelst the painter. Nothing could be more dull, more dreary, more dispiriting than the spot. The house, of which his lodgings occupied the first and second floors, was old and disjointed; and though an ancient stone mansion becomes picturesque when falling into ruins, the slight and ill-conditioned London houses, run up by bricklayers' contracts, degenerate, at the end of a century, into a collection of creaking boards, without a perpendicular line or right angle perceptible in the whole construction. Shrunken doors and ill-fitting windows admit eddies of air in all directions; while the sallow paint, dingy floors, smoky ceilings, and rickety stairs, present a miserable and dispiriting combination.

In Verelst's lodgings, selected for the advantage of the better light reaching the artist's chamber over the open space of a small burying-ground backing on South Audley-street, all was as clean as care and friction could make it. But the care applied to the burnishing of shabby furniture renders its inferiority only more prominent; and no person accustomed to the resorts of luxury, or even to habits of comfort, could have entered Verelst's apartments on the day they were first engaged by the poor painter, without experiencing the heavy depression arising from the survey of utter discomfort.

He had not been established three days, however, before those cheerless rooms assumed the importance acquired by the roughest casket enshrining some precious object. Two beings, more graceful of form and feature than even the imagination of the gifted painter could have supplied, were dispensing a charm over the place; and, in addition to the gentle presence of Esther and Salome, the rooms were brightened by a variety of those trivial but striking objects which betoken the presence of an artist—intrinsically valueless, so as to be compatible with poverty—yet indicative of superior intelligence and refinement.

On wooden brackets against the wall were placed two of the finest pictures of Verelst, which not only concealed the faded paper,

but created an atmosphere of grace and poetry, where all before was matter of fact. Beside the fire-place, in a recess formed by the abutting chimney usual in old-fashioned houses stood a curious carved cabinet, common enough in the quaint old cities of Holland and Germany, but acquiring a certain dignity amid the common-place vulgarity of a London lodging-house. On the top of this lay a thick, strange-looking volume, apparently as antiquated and curious as the cabinet itself; for its clumsy silver clasps were blackened with age, and the binding was of the dingy and solemn character peculiar to monastic libraries. This precious book was an object of all but idolatry to the painter. On removing to that wretched house from the abode in Bermondsey in which he had installed himself on his first arrival from Germany, banished from his native country on a suspicion of being a member of one of its most dangerous political associations, Verelst carried it devoutly under his arm, leaving the care of his goods and chattels, and even of his infirm wife, to the hands of his daughters. The utmost extremity of poverty would not have induced him to part with it;—in the first place, because it was a gift—a token of gratitude from one of his scholars, the young Count of Ehrenstein, who, on quitting the University, had despatched it from his ancestral castle in the Odenwald to his old master; in the second, because it was a treasure of no less magnitude than the sketch-book of Albert Durer.

Great must have been the importance of any individual in the eyes of Verelst ere he admitted him to view the contents of that sacred volume; and, during the three years of his residence in England, Basil Annesley alone had beheld those venerable clasps unlocked in his honour.

If the truth must be told, the favour was somewhat thrown away. Those sublimer touches of art which it requires the eye of an artist to detect,—those insights into the mysteries of nature which demand initiation on the part of the spectator, were as much lost upon the young guardsman, as the beauties of a Phidian *torso* on the eye of a child, who sees only a headless trunk, defaced and time-worn, where the virtuoso beholds the breathing *chef-d'œuvre* of the first of sculptors.

Basil Annesley, however, though too frank for dissimulation on ordinary matters, was careful not to wound the pride of the sensitive artist by exhibiting his indifference. He had conferred too many favours on Verelst, to mortify him by disparaging his only treasure. Even the weaknesses, moreover, of the father of Esther were sacred in his sight.

It would have afforded no consolation to the enthusiastic painter, to learn that any human being could be blind enough to appreciate what he estimated as his own puny efforts of art, far beyond the curious jottings and outlines by which the quaint old master had attempted to lay by stores for the aid of future invention; snatches of the picturesque,—of striking effects,—of graceful combinations,—which displayed, in many instances to eyes profane, only uncouth blottings and unmeaning devices. For nothing could exceed the contempt with which Verelst regarded the works to which the exigencies of his position compelled him to descend.

The wants of his family obliged him to paint down to the taste of the most unimaginative nation in Europe; and the two noble works constantly before his eyes,—for which he had never so much as received an offer, but which, during their composition, and the two years devoted to their execution, had appeared to contain the germs of fame and fortune, nay, in his more enthusiastic moments, to foreshow glimmerings of immortality,—afforded a perpetual memento that subjects taken from the *Niebelungen Lied*, even if treated with the power of Caravaggio, and the grace of Correggio, possess not half the charm, in English eyes, of a sporting scene in the Highlands, or some comicality of Cockney life.

The bitter lesson was now learned. But it had required the contemptuous refusal of a dozen picture-dealers to convince Verelst that the higher efforts of modern genius were valueless, unless when stamped as saleable by the prefix of a well-known name, accredited by the magic letters R.A.;—whereas for the humorous *croquis*, and sporting studies, such as Colonel Carrington had found so profitable a possession, a ready market was at command.

By the sale of these the artist maintained his family; and he might have maintained them in opulence, could he have brought himself fully and entirely to the level of his position. But the mind of Verelst was pitched to a lofty key. To *him* it was as much an effort to descend to these profitable puerilities, as for other men to attain to the inspirations of high art; and often, when engaged to complete for the trade some vulgar series of military groups or hunting adventures, he would fling away the pencil with disgust, and, snatching the palette, in a fit of desperation, paint out some former picture, in order to give existence to a new design —the faint shadowing of some poetical idea—never, alas! to be fully developed.

For there were no Roman princes, no luxurious cardinals, to give food to the family of the necessitous artist while abandoning himself to the nobler promptings of genius. When mildly remonstrated with by his feeble wife, he replied by citing the victory he had already attained over himself, by producing for lucre-sake works revolting to his taste.

It is true that, in his two girls, he had unconscious flatterers, strongly inciting him to the cultivation of his nobler aspirations. Whenever the poor artist gave the reins to his imagination, so as to produce some wild but exquisite design illustrative of the poetry of his native country, Salome and Esther, by their fond enthusiasm, not only stimulated his exertions, but almost repaid them. Their murmured applauses, their glistening eyes, their flushing cheeks—grateful as was the tribute to his heart, not only as a token of affection, but as indicative of the possession of genius sympathetic with his own—did not, however, suffice to satisfy his weekly creditors, or defray the rent of even his miserable lodging.

The poor paralytic mother, whose sickness was the real source of their poverty, often entreated the girls to be more sparing in their admiration. With the wisdom of experience, the infirm wife of Verelst recognised the futility of struggling against destiny. *She* knew, that to achieve the laurels of glory requires more than th-

mere possession of genius; that there must be favourable coincidences of time and place, and, above all, of national tastes and prosperity, to create a field for the triumph of art, and the renown of the artist.

Mrs. Verelst was a woman of no common order. Born of an opulent family, she had eloped in early girlhood from her father's house with the enthusiastic artist; and, ill-prepared by habits or education for the life of privation she had embraced, her health had fallen a sacrifice, and increased the evil. From the period of her younger daughter's birth, in consequence of premature exertion, she had become crippled; a burthen upon the family, save for the pains she was enabled to bestow upon the education of the girls. Though enfeebled by infirmity, she was unwearied in imparting to her daughters the accomplishments in which she excelled; and even now, though confined at all times to an easy chair, and often to her bed, her industrious hands were constantly exercised for the benefit of the family.

Sore had been the trial to this patient invalid to uproot herself from the humble but cheerful home at Heidelberg to which she had been so long habituated, and exchange the view from her windows over the rippling waters of the Neckar, and the green forests beyond, for the foggy, smoky, cheerless limits of a London street. Though of British extraction, she had never abided in England; and became as quickly conscious as any foreign visitor, of the oppressive cost of ordinary enjoyment in a city which supplies no gratuitous pleasures. If, however, either the mother or daughters pined after the purer atmosphere and franker sociability of Heidelberg, they were cautious not to afflict by their lamentations the inconsiderate man by whose want of caution they had been driven into exile.

The artist enjoyed in his family an impunity something between the reverence accorded to a prophet, and the indulgence conceded to an ailing child. His whims were studied, his foibles respected. Whatever evils befel them, it was the common care that they should fall lightest on the father. Among themselves, the disinterestedness of mind and exaltation of character which had reduced them to ruin, commanded a degree of respect that did them honour; and the two girls seemed to feel that they could not better testify their affection for their suffering mother, than by duty towards the improvident father she so dearly loved.

"How lonesome we have been these four days past!" observed Verelst, as he stood re-touching a picture upon the easel, the completion of which he had a thousand times forsworn. "Not a visitor the whole of this week!"

The girls, who sat working at the same embroidery-frame, waiting till their mother, who was reclining in her arm-chair, should feel disposed to resume the book she had been reading aloud to them, looked at each other and smiled,—or rather mutually refrained from a smile; for the only guests who ever crossed their threshold were Basil Annesley, and three or four print-sellers and picture-dealers, by whom Verelst was occasionally employed.

"I want cheering up, for the continuation of my military group-

ings!" resumed the artist. "I have been obliged to take up the brush instead of the pencil to-day, for want of some one to advise me respecting that charge of Polish lancers."

"Mr. Annesley is out of town, father. He is gone into Hampshire," said Esther, vaguely enough, if in reply to her father's observation.

"Besides," added the feeble voice of Mrs. Verelst, who, though sitting with her eyes closed, was not dozing, as they had supposed, "even if he *were* in town, Mr. Annesley has sense enough to know that it is not expedient for him to be a daily visitor in a house like ours."

"Why so?" inquired the painter, without raising his eyes from his work. "He used to come to us every day, at Heidelberg?"

"He was your pupil—he was studying the German language, and society was an object to him."

"Not more an object to him there, than *his* society here to *me*."

"Besides, Mr. Annesley was then fifteen, and Esther and Salome children of eleven and twelve."

"And is there not the same difference of age between them now?"

"There is a very great difference in the construction others might place upon their intimacy."

"*Their* intimacy?—My dear wife, you are dreaming," cried the painter, almost smiling at her simplicity, and not in the least suspecting his own. *Their* intimacy?—Surely you do not suppose that this excellent young man, who, though I never was able to endue him with much artistic perception, made good progress under my hands, (as his *aquarelle* yonder of the old Castle of Heidelberg, pasted into the lid of Esther's work-box, can testify,) this promising scholar of mine, I say, who has been of such essential service to us during our sojourn in this inhospitable country, cannot come to visit his old master, and advise him in his compositions so as to adapt them to the vulgar appetites of his customers, without provoking remarks by his condescension?—At all events, what have my daughters to do with it?—It is not Salome's pencils he sits pointing. It is not Esther's drawings, of which he suggests the subjects."

"Mr. Annesley is gone down to visit his invalid mother, papa," interposed Esther, apprehensive, perhaps, that her father might take cognizance of her tingling cheeks, or his wife consider it necessary to inspire him with a more worldly view of their relative position.

"*Has* he a mother?" inquired the artist, who took little heed of the ordinary business of life. "I always fancied from his independence that he was an orphan, and his own master."

"Do you not remember our first interest in him at Heidelberg originating in the letters he showed us from Lady Annesley?"

"True,—I remember.—Grave, cordial, heart-stirring letters.—But as he never mentioned her here, I thought she might have died in the interim. And so she is an invalid?—the reason, perhaps, Rachael, why he interests himself so kindly in your illness,—and is always suggesting some comfort or relief for you. It is such

a kind-hearted creature! I miss him, after a few days' absence, as I should miss one of *you*, were you to go away from me."

"Mr. Annesley is very kind, very affable, very condescending," said Mrs. Verelst, coldly, as if to give a discouraging view of their terms of friendship.

"But surely we are of as much service to HIM, mother, as he is to papa in the composition and sale of his drawings?" observed Salome. "Mr. Annesley has a charming voice; but it is Esther's instructions which have enabled him to do it justice."

"So long as he comes as a pupil," persisted Mrs. Verelst, "he comes on appropriate terms. But highly born as he is, and, as I presume, of good hereditary fortune, there can be no equality, and, consequently, no real friendship, between him and us. We are people earning our subsistence by our exertions,—he is a gentleman—a fine gentleman."

"He is a *man!*" cried Verelst, suddenly throwing down his brush, and assuming a tone of energy very unusual to him. "He is my benefactor, too:—but I should hate myself, and despise *him*, if I thought *that* any obstacle to his being my friend."

His wife remained silent; aware of the hazard of introducing suspicion into that simplest of human hearts. A woman's tact forewarned her that, if made to feel the danger and delicacy of their position as regarded Basil Annesley, he would feel it so acutely as to render impossible all further intimacy between them.

Before Verelst had resumed his brush or the girls recovered their apprehensions that some unpleasant explanation might ensue, a knock was heard at the street door, and a step on the stairs. Neither the one nor the other was of a nature to agitate the daughters or rejoice the father by a hope of Annesley's arrival.

"So, sir," cried an austere-looking man, whose complexion vied with that of one of the crackled china vases forming part of his stock in trade, "I have been expecting to hear news of you this week or more. How go on, pray, the pair of battle-pieces I ordered in November, and which were to be finished clean off by Christmas?"

"I told you, when I undertook them, that the completion must be uncertain," replied Verelst, resuming his work on recognising in his visitor the proprietor of a rococo shop, to whom he occasionally furnished cabinet pictures on given subjects, and at prices which rendered the connection far from advantageous to himself.—"You may remember I informed you that I was occupied in a series of military illustrations, about to be lithographed for a periodical work; which I must finish before I commence any new work."

"You said you had a job on hand for some printseller. But *this* thing, I conclude, does not form one of your military groups?" said the stranger, pointing to a design of the King of Thule, from Schiller's ballad, which was beginning to make some progress on the canvas of Verelst.

"That, sir, is a work of imagination, executed for my own pleasure," replied the artist, coldly.

"So I should guess; leastwise, it's plaguy unlike to promote the pleasure of other people!"—observed the facetious Mr. Stubbs;

sinking deliberately into the chair which had been placed for him by Salome, on his entrance.

"It's a thousand pities, Mr. Thingumee, that you keep idling your time away in this fashion, and disapp'inting your empl'yers, when you might make a mint of money by sticking to business. —I call it business to paint picturs such as folks can understand, and such as folks is consequently likely to buy. What could *I* do, I should like to know, with such an outlandish piece of goods as you've afore you? Ask any man as has exper'ence of such things, what modern picturs have found the best market. He'll tell you out and out, those with good straight for'ard, intelligible subjects, —such as Gainsborough's Pigs, or Holmes's Cut Finger, or Heaphy's Crossing the Brook, or such like.—The English are sensible folks, Mr. Thingumee, and don't like to be asked to step up into the clouds, so long as they've their own tight little island to stand on."

"I have always heard, Sir," replied Verelst, (in English somewhat better than his own, for twenty years of wedded life had familiarized the artist with the language of his wife,) "that there is no country where the higher branches of art are better estimated than in England; or where higher prices have been paid for the *chef d'œuvres* of the ancient masters."

"I grant you, Sir,—I grant you;—as a matter of trade,—as a safe investment. John Bull is a man of merchandise, and ready to buy up standard picturs, just as he used to buy toolips in Holland, when toolips was matter of spekilation. But if you fancy, that 'cause he gives two thousand guineas for a Claude which there's a good chance of selling to the Emperor of Russia for three, he's like to give a long price for such a rigmarole concern as the one you're wasting your time on, (instead of finishing picturs contracted for,) I can tell you you'll find yourself in the wrong box, and no mistake!"

The girls looked up anxiously from their work, dreading lest their father's reply to this coarse apostrophe should be an angry one. It was some relief to find that he was smiling to himself, with the silent contempt of superiority.

Mr. Stubbs was evidently disappointed.—Accustomed to wrangle with the persons in his employ, he had hoped to raise a breeze.

"There's *one* p'int on which I beg we may understand one another, my good friend," said he, with an insulting wag of the head,—"and that is, that none of your designs for the lethography trade is to be reproduced in my picturs. I bargained, please to recollect, that my couple of battle-pieces was to be strictly original, and the copyright my own; and it wont suit my purpose to have 'em a figuring in black and white in every printseller's window."

"I understood, Sir, that the pictures you wanted were to be skirmishes in the time and costume of the middle ages,—something in the style of Salvator's battle-pieces.—The drawings I am supplying, are to illustrate the military costume of the modern nations of Europe."

"Ay, some'hat in the style of Salvator!"—said the dealer, catching at the expression, and overlooking the argument of the painter. "Now, I tell ye what, Mr. What's-your-name,—If you've

a mind to put out your strength in them two picturs, why I'm prepared to do the thing handsome by you. I spoke of eight pounds, or thereabouts, for the pair——"

"You offered ten guineas," said Verelst, firmly, without removing his hand or eye from the canvas.

"Well, p'rhaps it *may* have been guineas,—I can't say, without casting my eye over my mem'randum-book, which I don't carry about me. But, as I was saying, if you've a mind to make them picturs what they ought to be, I don't care if I go as far as fifteen pound for the pair,—provided I secure the copyright, and the picturs is high and dry in my house by the first of April."

"You have fixed upon a curious epoch, Sir, for the completion of such a bargain!" observed Verelst, with a quiet smile. "But I can undertake no such limitation. When I bring you my pictures, you shall purchase them or not, as you think proper, and on such terms as we may then agree upon."

The indignant Mr. Stubbs, who had not often found the poor artist so cool at a bargain, now began to surmise that Verelst had fallen into the hands of some rival dealer, and was beginning to be better acquainted with his own value. In order to satisfy himself on this point, he persisted in his bullying tone.

"This wont do for me, sir," said he, striking his stick upon the ground, with a vehemence that caused the poor invalid, whose nerves we so studiously respected in the family, to bound in her chair.—"I've got my customers to satisfy; and when I've promised a gentleman to have some'hat ready for him by a certain day, I choose to be punctooal."

"My pictures, then, have been ordered of you?" said the artist coolly, arranging on his palette the colour prepared for the gray beard of the king of Thule.

"I said no sich thing, that I'm aware on!" retorted the dealer. "Gentlemen who is a furnishing their galleries, or their houses, comes to me and says, 'Stubbs, we want a pair o' picturs for a dining-room, some'hat in the animal or battle line, three feet by two, or two-and-twenty inches by fourteen, as the case may be,—some'hat as 'll look well in an oak frame, or a Louis XIV. frame, according as it happens.'—Well, sir, I'm bound to answer: 'I've got nothing of the size by me, my lord, but if you'll look in next month, maybe I shall be able to satisfy you.'—Sir, if his lordship looks in and finds nothing, he's a right to look elsewhere, and be displeased into the bargain."

The artist smiled. He was beginning to appreciate the line of business pursued by Mr. Stubbs.

"What I have to say, therefore," pursued the dealer, assuming a milder tone, "is, that if you've a mind to clench the bargain, I'm willing to leave a five-pound note or so with you, by way of earnest."

Verelst was just then so anxiously employed retouching the mouth of the king of Thule, that he paid no attention.

In another moment, Esther had stolen towards her father, and was whispering in his ear the offer made by his visitor; and perhaps suggesting motives for its acceptance. So, at least, Mr.

Stubbs would probably have inferred, but that his attention was, at that moment, engrossed by the beautiful face thus suddenly presented to his admiration.

"Why, as sure as life, that's the original of the Gurl and Goat you sold me last spring!"—said he, unceremoniously contemplating the graceful form and beautiful countenance of the artist's daughter; who, unable to surmise that it was in *such* terms her father's exquisite picture of the Esmeralda, from Victor Hugo's romance of "Nôtre Dame," was likely to be qualified, stood regarding him with amazement.

"A pretty plague that pictur' brought upon my shoulders!"—added the dealer, shrugging them, as if still conscious of the infliction.

"I thought you told me you had sold it?" said Verelst, calmly.

"Ay; but I didn't tell you who I'd sold it to;—and I know that another time I'd as lief drive a bargain with the devil. However, if he should come again for a companion, (as has once or twice hapened, Mr. Thingumee, with picturs of your'n,) I'm glad at least, to know I can get rid of him with noos of where the face is to be found, concerning which he made such a deuce's-own-to-do in my shop."

The curiosity of Verelst was, by this time, sufficiently awakened to induce him to ask the questions anticipated by his visitor.

"Why, you're to know," resumed Mr. Stubbs, in reply, (and as he spoke, both the mother and daughters suspended their needles to listen,) "you are to know, that, finding the pictur' hang on hand, and nowise taking, for not a soul of the nobs as deals at my shop could make head or tail of the story with which it was connected—I stuck it up one day in my window, along with the Nankin vases, and shells, and minerals, and what not, as I always does with picturs I find unsaleable to thorough-going ammytoors.—Well, Sir! scarce was it on show, before a crowd was collected round the winders—some laughing at the ideer of a goat with such horns and feet as them in the pictur'; but most on 'em attracted by seeing fresh bright colours in a shop like mine, which seldom has anything in it but the meller tones and rich colouring o' the old masters. Well, Sir—among these starers was an old gentleman, in a decent enough suit o' clothes, who stood there a matter of an hour, a-staring at the pictur'.—Thinks I to myself, 'a customer!'—for though there was nothing about such a coat as his'n as looked as if it had a purse in its pocket, I've seen many a Jew dealer with thousands and thousands at his command, go the length of a price in three figurs for a pictur', yet with patches at his elbows.—However, off marched the old fellow at last, without so much as a question asked in the shop. Somehow or another, I guessed I hadn't seen the last on him: and, next morning, having set up the Gurl and Goat in the winder for a second chance, the boy a-watching the shop soon calls out to me, as I was a-breakfasting in the back parlour,—'Master, master!' says he, 'here's the old chap again, watching the winder as though he'd have a snatch at the gem-box.'—Up I starts, Sir,—and, seeing his eyes so fixed again upon the pictur', stepped out on the pavement, as if I wanted to arrange the awning.

"'A pretty thing *that*,' says I, by way of axing pardon for putting him aside;—and if you'll believe me, when the old feller looked up to answer me, his eyes was full o' tears!—I was nigh laughing outright, to think any one could find matter to cry at in a daub of a Gurl with a Goat.—Upon which, instead of noticing my civility, the whimperer showed his manners by marching off. A good riddance, thinks I—for I'm not one o' those who considers an idle crowd round a shop any advantage. Customers is seldom found in such assembling.'"

"But I thought you told us this person had purchased the Esmeralda?" said Verelst.

"You'd have been a conjuror to have guessed as much, I can tell you, if you'd seen the individual as I sold it to," rejoined the dealer. "I thought no more, in course, o' the old chap; though my boy a'ter'ards told me that not an evening passed but, as soon as the lamps was lighted, he'd pass by the shop, as if on his way elsewhere, but never without casting a longing look at the winder; and ten minutes a'ter'ards, back again, no doubt on the same errand, though he took care not to stand gaping, as he had at first. Well, Sir—'twas autumn-time, and no bus'ness stirring; so I took the opportoonity, just then, of my annival visit to Margate. When I came back, the pictur' was gone,—within ten shillings, too, of the price I'd first set upon it:—and Mrs. Stubbs, who'd been left in charge o' the shop, informed me that one day an old Jew, with whom we'd often had dealings in the lapidary line, after making a deal with her for some engraved stones, hintalios, and cammyos, inquired, in a sort o' careless way, the price o' the Gurl and Goat.

"At first, he scouted it at the price named, but seemed cur'ous to learn how it had come into our hands. Now, it's a rule in our bus'ness, Mr. Thingumee, never to give explanations o' that natur' to no body, 'specially to dealers. So my missus said that I was away on a scursion; and that she knowed no more than nothin' at all about none o' the picturs' except the price marked on 'em. So, not to trouble you with more p'ticlars than necessary, at last they came to a deal; and a'ter he'd book'd up for the lot, says the old Jew, 'I'd give a trifle,' says he, 'to know the artist as painted that pictur'!' My wife hinted as much as that maybe he was dead and gone—that the pictur' was p'rhaps an old 'un.—'How can that be,' says the Jew, 'when the romance itself is only of recent date?' My wife know'd nothing about romances—not she——"

"But I told you, Sir, that my picture represented a scene from the novel of Nôtre Dame."

"If you did, I've other matters to think of than to stuff my head with the stories of novel-books.—Well, Sir, a'ter the Jew had fairly made his bargain, my missus swears that he stood a-looking at the pictur' with tears in his eyes, all as one as the gentleman I'd noticed in the street; and she fancied as she heard him a-muttering atween his teeth,—'I never thought to have had a sight o' that blessed face again!'—However, Mrs Stubbs is a nervous, fanciful, stericky body, and apt to take conundrums into her head. 'Where shall I send the pictur' home to?' says she, by way of putting an end to his vagaries.—'*Send!*' says he. 'I'll carry it myself.' 'The boy's got nothing to do, Sir,' says Mrs. Stubbs, purlitely; 'and I'm

always glad to obleege a customer.'—'I'll carry it myself,' persisted the surly old fellow, without so much as a thank-ye. And without more ado, he hoisted the Gurl and Goat on his arm, and out he trudged. My missus, who was somewhat thrown a-back by his p'rumptory air, no sooner sees him out o' the shop, than she finds lying on the counter, the packet of hintalios, for which the Jew had just paid down forty pounds odd, on the nail: so, having a mind to know what became o' the pictur', she bid the boy hurry a'ter him, and be sure not to give him the packet till he'd follored him home. According to the lad's account——but maybe I'm tiring *you* ladies!"—said Mr. Stubbs, interrupting himself, on perceiving the breathless attention he was exciting in the little family.

"On the contrary, Sir, we are deeply interested," replied Mrs. Verelst, with her usual well-bred gentleness.

"Well then, ma'am, as I was a-saying, 'cording to the lad's account, the old chap hadn't perceeded many streets, which he did charily and cautiously, avoiding jostling with foot-passengers, as if he was a guarding a living gurl and goat he was fond of, instead of a pictur' o' no p'rticlar valooe, he looked round cautiously, as though he'd a guess at being watched. Maybe he'd noticed the lad in the shop; for, having gone the length o' the street, and stopped again, and still found the young feller at his heels, he asked him short round in plain words, what was his bus'ness? The boy had nothin' for it, but to give up the parcel, expecting, maybe, a trifle for his pains,—the lot being of sich valooe. But the old feller gave nothin' but a grunt, and having pocketed his packet, on again with the pictur'!"—

"And did the boy still follow him, sir?" interrupted Esther, as Mr. Stubbs paused for breath; or, perhaps, like other orators, to stimulate the curiosity of his hearers.

"He had his missus's orders, and that was enough," said the dealer, fancying everyone as well aware as himself of the absolute sceptre wielded by his helpmate. "More cautious than at first, he crept on at a distance, till he watched the old man into a house in Greek-street, Soho. But, Lord! what was the good *o' that?* When, on his return from this precious fox-chase, Mrs. Stubbs looked in B'yle's Guide and the D'rectory, one a'ter t'other, the number pointed out by the lad was missing in both. The house was all as one as uninhabited. H'wever, on hearing his story, it struck *me*, maybe the Jew, who seemed so mightily taken with the pictur', might have a fancy for a companion: so, the first idle day, off I set to the house. The shutters was all shut, sir; and the doorway as dirty as if neither broom or scrubbing-brush had *touched* it for years.—H'wever, I knocked and rang, and rang and knocked; and hollow enough all sounded within. But the hollow sounds of my own rings and knocks was all the good I got; and a'ter half an hour wasted, I saw I might as well give up the bus'ness."

"You did *not* gain admittance, then?" inquired the artist, curious to learn the mode of the picture-dealer's proceedings in such cases.

"I did another day, sir; but only by management,—and plaguy

bad management it was. A matter of six weeks a'ter'ards, I was passing through Greek-street, on bus'ness of my own, when what should I spy but a smart cab a-waiting at the door o' the old deserted house; though for the matter o' that, it was just as much shut up as ever, and just as grimy and dull. Up I goes, h'wever; and, by way o' not frighting the spiders, if I turned out to be mistaken in s'posing the owner o' the cab to have been admitted within, gave a very gentle ring. A dirty old 'oman—a fit match to the place—opened it in a *stanter*, as they say in French.

"'I've bus'ness, ma'am, with your master,' says I, and walked in so coolly, that no oppersition did she think of offering. The old cat made no move to show me further; so I made bold to open the front parlour door. All dark as pitch, and smelling as mouldy as a family vault. Shutting the door gently, I thought I'd try my luck at the back 'un.—Locked! However, the n'ise I made, trying to open it, reached them as was within, just as their v'ices reached *me*; and in a trice, the lock turned, and the door was placed ajar.——I just leave *you* to guess, Mrs. Thingumee, who was within!"

"I fear it would be wasting your time, sir, as well as my own," replied Mrs. Verelst, to whom the inquiry appeared to be addressed.

"Why, neither more nor less than, as large as life, the old gentleman whom I had noticed so often at my winder, staring at the 'Gurl and Goat!'"

"But you said there were other voices—"

"Ay—and t'other v'ice—('twas my business to have known without knocking, so often as it had sounded in my shop,)—t'other v'ice was that of my best customer, the Duke of Rochester; to whom I've sold picturs and statooes to the amount of no matter how many thousands of pounds."

"You were admitted, then, into their presence?"—

"Not I; nor I hadn't no wish, when I saw I was an introoder, or at least was told so by the old fogrum who opened the door.—I hadn't a guess *then*, what sort of treason they were a-hatching together; and a'ter being unceremoniously walked out o' the house by the old chap, who wouldn't so much as listen to what I had to say in explanation, I didn't care to inquire. But a week ago, or so, I had an ugly money transaction with a fine lady customer of mine, who'd given me a bill of her husband's in payment, as required me to follow up the parties; and while so doing, I was sent from pillar to post, till at last I got referred to one A. O., in Greek-street, Soho. The murder was out, sir!—the old Jew, who bought the pictur' of me, was neither more nor less than one o' the agents employed on such errands by the famous Money-lender!"

"I am sorry my picture should have been the means of exposing you to so disagreeable an adventure," observed Verelst. "It seems, however, to have been, in a great measure, one of your own seeking."

"What do you mean by my own seeking, sir?" cried Mr. Stubbs, again striking the point of his stick against the floor. "For as little as you seem to understand, Mr. Thingumee, of the ways of carrying on bus'ness in England, I'd have you to know that—"

The loud and angry tones of the dealer were at that moment interrupted by the sudden entrance of a person whose ascent of the creaking stairs had been drowned in his vociferation. The voice of Mr. Stubbs became silent; but every other person in the room uttered an exclamation of delight, to welcome the arrival of—Basil Annesley!

CHAPTER VIII.

> Love took up the glass of Time, and turned it in his glowing hands,
> Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands;
> Love took up the harp of life, and smote on all its chords with might—
> Smote the chord of self, that, trembling, passed in music out of sight!
>
> TENNYSON.

No sooner did the picture-dealer notice the courteous familiarity with which the young guardsman accosted the artist, and the almost deferential tone in which he inquired after the health of Mrs. Verelst, than he rose instinctively from his seat. There was no mistaking the fact that the guest belonged to the order of society which he regarded as his customers; or that the painter's family lived with him on terms of intimacy amounting to friendship. Coarse as he was, Mr. Stubbs knew himself at that moment to be out of place.

"I will call about this little bus'ness, Sir, another time," said he, addressing Verelst, as he prepared to quit the room; and it was only as he moved slowly towards the door, that, incited perhaps by curiosity to ascertain what could have brought so fashionable-looking a young man to the fireside of a poor painter, he bethought him of the rare loveliness of Salome and her sister.

A significant smile overspread his features, on a discovery he considered so pregnant with evil meaning. It was possibly the same perception that induced him, after having closed the door and gained the staircase, to return into the room, and by way of certifying the relative position of the parties, re-approach poor Verelst with a whispered request that he would keep to himself the Greek-street secret.—

"You'll oblige me, Sir," said he, in an audible whisper, very different from that of his preceding conversation, "by refraining from all mention of the story of the gurl's picture and A. O.!"

Had Mr. Stubbs searched the world over for a word calculated to startle the feelings of the young stranger, he could not have been more successful. The face of Annesley became instantly crimsoned. Apprehending that the vulgar fellow who thus unceremoniously addressed the father of Esther, could have no other motive for his allusion than the discovery of the difficulties from which he had extricated himself by the aid of Abednego Osalez, in order to relieve his humble friend, Basil almost trembled lest the whole affair was about to be exposed before his face by the officiousness of a stranger. It was not till after Mr. Stubbs, after bowing facetiously around him, had again quitted the room, that Annesley breathed freely.

"That is one of my enlightened patrons, my dear Mr. Annesley

said Verelst, resuming his pencil under the cheering influence of Basil's presence—"one of those who treat me like a clod of the earth, yet expect me to exhibit the instincts and inspiration of a higher sphere."

Basil replied by an ejaculation of disgust.

"But, my good Mr. Annesley—my dear young friend," resumed the painter, "these girls told me just now, you had been in the country nursing a sick relative. Are you quite sure you have not taken her disorder? I never saw you look so ill, since the time of your fever at Heidelberg, when we had you into our house for change of air!"

"You remind me of one of the happiest epochs of my life!" cried Basil, suddenly acquiring all the bloom of which Verelst was quite justified in accusing him of being deficient.

"Ay—*now* you look somewhat more like yourself again!"—cried the painter. "*Now* you are a fitter object for an artist's studio. You cannot imagine, my dear Sir, how I have wanted you. The sketches cannot get on without you. If you had remained long in the country I should have been ruined. I wanted spirits to proceed to business during your absence. But since you are here again, I will push back the King of Thule in disgrace into his corner.—Salome! bring forward the drawing-table."—

And while the young man was bending over the chair of the invalid, inquiring anxiously into the events of the four or five last days, without heeding the garrulity of his old master, the change was accomplished. On Basil's release from his almost filial attentions to the worn and wasted, yet still beautiful invalid, all was in readiness to be set in movement, by his advice touching the helmets of Prussian lancers, and the boots of Croat pandours.

Taking the chair placed for him by Salome beside the artist, he proceeded, with patient good-humour, to play the critic on the spirited military groups, in which it was indeed difficult to point out a fault, save in trifling accessories of costume. So animated were the charges, so admirable the equestrian combinations, that Basil, instead of enlarging on a few errors of equipment, fell, as usual, into rhapsodies at the spirit and originality of the whole.

It was probably the stimulus of this very enthusiasm which had been wanting to Verelst; for in a moment his chalks were in full activity, and Basil at leisure to perceive that the seat provided for him by Salome commanded a view of the embroidery frame over which the graceful heads of the two girls were stooping together. It was only natural that he should thenceforward divide his attention between the withered hand,—under which was growing into life a rude bridge over a mountain torrent, hotly defended by a legion of Tyrolese peasants, armed with the picturesque wildness of irregular warfare, against a trimly dressed detachment of French light infantry, in all the studied equipment of military array,—and the fairy fingers of the sisters, as they flew over their work.

Though the hands of the two girls were closely intertwined as they sat together, so that the slight form of the one almost effaced the still slenderer figure of the other, the eyes of Basil had no difficulty in detecting the hand so dear to him,— the hand which had trem-

bled on his sudden entrance,—and which now, in the joy of his presence in that chamber, was performing thrice the work effected by the less-interested Salome, who was sufficiently at her ease to contemplate, every now and then, at idle leisure, the venerable figure of her father, contrasted with that of the handsome young visitor bending over him while watching the efforts of his pencil. Placed as Salome was, she was, of course, enabled to see that, ever and anon, his eyes wandered furtively towards Esther; from the detection of whose downcast looks he knew himself to be secure.

"Do you happen to know anything, Mr. Annesley, of a family named Maitland?" suddenly inquired Mrs. Verelst, after exercising, perhaps, the same unnoticed scrutiny as Salome.

Annesley started, and looked confused.

"They live in Arlington-street," added Esther, in a low voice, taking this opportunity to lift her eyes to his face, and surprised, in her turn, to find it covered with conscious blushes.

"The son is a brother-officer of mine," replied he, gradually recovering his self-possession.

"It *is*, then, as we supposed, to *you* that Esther is indebted for her introduction to the family!" observed Mrs. Verelst.

"*Introduction!*" repeated Basil, in evident surprise.

"I received, an hour ago, a note, signed Lucy Maitland, begging to know my terms for tuition, and requesting me to be in Arlington-street at three o'clock to-morrow," said Esther, in explanation.

The former confusion of countenance of Basil Annesley was now a thousand times augmented. The idea of Esther Verelst—*his* Esther—a singing-mistress to those flighty girls, in that showy, heartless house, subjected to the gaze of the "string of puppies" frequenting it—exposed to the silly impertinence of Lady Maitland—condemned to all the ignominy inflicted on a teacher, by people of empty heads and callous hearts!

"And has Miss Verelst engaged herself?" said he, addressing the mother.

"She merely wrote accepting the appointment for to-morrow, when there will probably be little difficulty in adjusting the question of terms and hours," replied the invalid.

"You do me too much honour in supposing that the recommendation came from *me*," said Annesley, after a pause, in which he had been balancing the evils likely to arise to the beautiful Esther Verelst from such a connexion, against the advantage to the necessitous family of an additional guinea a-week earned by their exertions. "I should scarcely have suggested a place likely to expose a person so timid as Est—— as Miss Verelst, to the constant notice and molestation of precisely the order of persons whose familiarity drove her from the rehearsals at the opera. The advantage to be derived would be dearly purchased by exposure to the habits of a house, of all others of my acquaintance the one into which I should be least disposed to introduce a sister of my own."

Esther was satisfied. The pang excited in her bosom by Basil's confusion at the first mention of the name of Maitland, was gradually subsiding.

"Surely," observed Salome, little suspecting the new vexatio

to which she was about to give rise, "Maitland was the name of the ladies with whom we saw you that night at the opera, when Madame Branzini was good enough to lend us her box?"—

"I scarcely recollect," stammered Basil, with some embarrassment.

"Oh! yes—we met you on the stairs with a beautiful girl on your arm, whom you hurried into a carriage, and returned to assist *us*. I remember hearing it announced as that of Lady Maitland."

"How can you recollect such trash, child?" interrupted Verelst. "Mr. Annesley! what think you of placing the stout fellow with the scythe, who is striking down the standard of France, on the broken parapet of the bridge?"

"Admirable!" cried Basil, glad to direct his eyes towards the drawing at which he had been hitherto only pretending to look. "It will make a modern edition of the famous Battle of the Standard. But what a pity, Sir, to throw away this exquisite design on a series for which you are so miserably paid. Why not place it in the gorge of a mountain pass, and execute it in oils?"

"Ay, why not?"—cried the artist, recalling, at that moment to mind his order for the two battle-pieces, and justly surmising that Mr. Stubbs had neither art nor learning enough to detect the anachronism, if such a study were made the companion to a skirmish of the *condottieri* of Sir John Hawkwood and the Cardinal de Bourbon; but little suspecting the anxiety of mind which this interruption of their conversation was causing to his favourite daughter.

"Esther has been setting to music, since you have been gone, those pretty words you brought her the last time you were here," observed Mrs. Verelst, after her husband and his guest had sufficiently debated together the question of the new Battle of the Standard, which was to rival that of Leonardo.

"I thought she would like them!" cried Basil, again raising his eyes, and meeting those of Esther with a degree of frankness that almost satisfied her he was not actuated by fear of exposing his own flirtations, in opposing her entrance into the Maitland family.

"And a fine melancholy ditty she has made of them," added her father.

"They were appropriate only to a minor key," observed Esther, in an apologetic tone.

"Will you not let me hear the ballad, and judge for myself?" inquired Basil.

"I am so afraid of not satisfying your expectation," said Esther, rising, however, instantly from her work. "I am sure they are favourite verses of yours, or you would not have been at the trouble of copying them.

"Shew me the man who would like his favourite verses the less from hearing them sung by such a voice as yours, Esther!"—said her father, fondly.

It was, perhaps, the dread of further encomiums which hastened the blushing girl in her preparations for complying with Mr. Annesley's request, by throwing open the door of her mother's room,

in which (in submission to the requirements of the artist's studio) stood the piano.

Sweet as it was expressive, was the ritournelle that prefaced Esther Verelst's articulate and melodious recital of the following stanzas:—

BALLAD.

Yes! other eyes may brighten, love,
When gazing upon thine,
As gloomiest brooks run glittering where
The shedding sunbeams shine.
Oh! did I love thee less, be sure,
Mine own would brighter be;
Content thee, then, with smiles from them,
And bear with tears from me!

Yes! other tones may soften love,
When to thine ear addrest,
As breezes lulled, the barque allure
O'er ocean's treacherous breast.
Oh! did I love thee less, be sure,
My words would smoother be;
Content thee, then, with praise from them,
And bear with truth from me!

Yes! other arms may bear thee, love,
O'er fortune's flow'ry way;
Mine, with unwearied fervent faith,
Abide the darker day.
Oh! did I love thee less, be sure,
My aid would prompter be;
Content thee, then, with pleasing them,
And keep thy love for me!

To the mortification of poor Esther, not a word of commendation broke from Annesley, at the conclusion of her performance. Her father exclaimed—"Brava, my girl, charming, charming!"—but the voice of Annesley was mute. The piano commanded no view of the room in which her auditors were seated; and she had consequently no means of surmising that if her ungracious friend uttered no common phrase of compliment, it was because his feelings were too deeply excited for words. Salome, who had watched his tearful eyes during the exquisite song of her sister, was satisfied.

"After all, this is a doleful ditty to salute a friend with on his return,"—observed the artist, also noticing the silence of Basil, and with a glance detecting the cause, which he attributed to the sensitiveness produced by a previous shock on the spirits. "You forget, my Esther, that Mr. Annesley is come to us from the sick-room of one he loves, and that he wants cheering."

"I am always cheered when so kindly welcomed to this fireside," said Basil, attempting to rally his spirits; "in the first place by your cordiality;—in the second, by the sight of your rational occupations. The do-nothing, good-for-nothing world *I* live in, contains few sights so pleasant."

"I fancied," said Salome, "that the ladies of England were highly enlightened and accomplished?"

"*Superficially* accomplished. They learn as much music and drawing, and as many languages, as can be taught for money; but nothing is done to cultivate that intellectual sense which renders such acquirements available."

"And these Miss Maitlands, Esther's pupils?" demanded Salome, returning to the charge.

"Your sister has decided, then, on accepting their tuition?" demanded Basil, in a constrained tone, as Esther, after closing her instrument, returned into the sitting-room.

"I scarcely know what pretext I could find for refusing," she observed, in a timid voice, resuming her former place.

"Would you favour me with a sight of Miss Maitland's letter?" inquired Annesley.

"The letter?—willingly,—said Mrs. Verelst, producing it from a paper-rack on the table beside her chair.

"*This* is the handwriting of the brother, who is in the same regiment with myself," observed Basil, after examining the letter, having from the first surmised the possibility of a hoax on the part of his brother officers. "If you permit me, I will make inquiries of Lady Maitland concerning her intentions; and bring you an exact account, before you give yourself the trouble and annoyance of a long walk this cold weather, for the purpose, perhaps, of gratifying unjustifiable curiosity."

"But what curiosity can poor Esther have excited among persons to whom she is known only by name?" observed Mrs. Verelst, mistrustfully.

"Pardon me,—she is personally known to Lady Maitland's son, who has probably mentioned her to his sisters. Surely," said he, turning suddenly to Esther for confirmation, "you remember the tall, fair young man, so frequently with old Colonel Carrington, who accosted us at the stage-door, the day you made that hasty exit from rehearsal?"

"Perfectly!" replied Esther, now fully enlightened as to the origin of his objections, "and I am consequently certain it would be disagreeable to me to give lessons to Lady Maitland's daughters."

"Still, before you give a decided negative, which will, of course, be ungraciously construed, allow me to institute some inquiry into the object of the parties," resumed Basil.—"I see these people daily. I will even make a point of going there to-night. Nothing will be easier than for me to discover, without compromising *you*, whether the young ladies have any serious intention of improving themselves under your hands, and requiting your trouble. The girls are good-natured, though silly and trifling; and would not, I imagine, lend themselves to unladylike mystification."

"*Must* you go there to-night?" inquired Esther, blushing crimson.

"Is there any obstacle?" inquired Basil, surprised at her remonstrance.

"Only that this is Twelfth Night," observed Salome, for once almost as much embarrassed as her sister. "Madame Branzini, who

intends to *faire tirer les rois* at her house, has made us promise to join her family party; and begged us, should you return to town, to assure you how much honoured she should feel by your company."

"I accept with pleasure," cried Basil. "But your friend, Madame Branzini, wisely adheres in England to your rational hours of the Continent, and will expect her visitors before nine, and dismiss them at eleven; till which hour, Lady Maitland would be much surprised to see any evening guest enter her house.—I shall, therefore, be able to reconcile both visits.—I dine at the Club, and will be with your friend at—what hour did you say you were going?"—

"We shall be there soon after eight," replied Salome. "We always return home, you know, to assist my mother at ten."

"I will not hear of being an obstacle to your pleasures to-night," said Mrs. Verelst, cheerfully. "It is so seldom you enjoy a pleasant party. Twelfth Day comes but once a year. Do you remember, Mr. Annesley, how merrily we kept it the winter you were at Heidelberg?"

Basil remembered only too well the joyous cordiality of his old professor's family party.

"Nay, surely, *you* were *le roi de la fève*?—ay, and Esther yonder was your queen," cried the artist, laughing heartily at the recollection. "She was a mere child then, and *you* little better than a boy. But I remember what a fanciful little majesty we made of her in her mother's brocaded dress, with pompons and powder, and old point, like a queen in one of Mademoiselle de Scudéri's novels! Little gipsy that you were, Esther!—you made your old father trick out your draperies and arrange your throne."

"I wish we may amuse ourselves half so well to-night, at Madame Branzini's!" murmured Esther, with a sigh. "I was a child then—I feared nothing then. *Now* I seem to be afraid of everything and everybody."

"You were then in your own home and country, Esther," said the artist, with a sigh far heavier than her own,—"a comfort, my poor child, of which your father's inconsideration has for ever deprived you!"

"Not for *ever*, I trust!" responded Mrs. Verelst, in a low tone.

"As we are to meet to-night, I will shorten my visit now," said Basil, rising from his seat, by way of interrupting these saddening retrospections; "but I must not go without accomplishing its real object. I have brought you a curiosity to look at, sir," resumed he, addressing Verelst, after drawing a small volume from his pocket. "Something in your own way—a little book which I borrowed from my mother."

It was a scarce copy of Hollar's Engravings after Holbein's Dance of Death, which was examined by Verelst with deliberation and enthusiasm.

"I know these designs," said he, "far better than I know my own. I spent a month at Basle, for the purpose of studying the characteristics of that quaint old master. This is a curious copy, and seems enriched with original interleavings," he observed, scrutinising the volume with the eye of a connoisseur. "But what

have we here? There is an Arabic inscription on the title-page—or Sanscrit—or—stay!—*you*, Rachel, can help us here. Are not these Hebrew characters?"

Basil Annesley took the open volume from the hands of Verelst, to convey it to his wife. On his way he naturally glanced at the inscription, which was decidedly Hebrew, and written in ink almost invisible from age. But at the foot, in a modern hand-writing, to his utter amazement, were inscribed the memorable initials of—A. O.!

Before he had recovered the shock caused by this startling coincidence, the attention of Basil was absorbed by the effect produced on Mrs. Verelst by the sight of the volume. Pale as death, with quivering lips and suspended respiration, she sank back in her chair the moment the inscription was placed before her. Esther and Salome, whose attention was constantly directed towards the invalid, were by her side in a moment.

"Place a screen before the fire. I was afraid the room was too close for her," faltered Esther, opening a large green fan which lay constantly on her mother's table.

"The ether, father!—you will find it on the dressing-table within," cried Salome; nor had either of them leisure to notice that it was by Basil, by whom, as by a devoted son, the commission was executed. The eyes of Mrs. Verelst, however, even after the application of the ether to her temples, remained closed, and her hands cold as marble.

The book, a glance at which young Annesley could not forbear regarding as the origin of her sudden seizure, had now fallen on the floor. The dispiriting nature of the frontispiece (which represented the grisly skeleton of Death beguiling an old man into the grave by the music of a dulcimer) had probably conveyed an insupportable shock to the sensitive mind of the enfeebled invalid.

Some minutes elapsed before Mrs. Verelst evinced the smallest token of consciousness,—a longer period than Basil, who had often seen her overcome by faintness, had ever known her remain thoroughly insensible to what was passing around her. At length she slowly unclosed her eyes, and a faint murmur broke from her lips. Esther instantly bent down her head to listen; but Annesley, without any such effort, distinctly heard her exclaim, "My father! *who* was it spoke to me of my father?"

"Better wheel her into her own room," interposed the artist, who, during the swoon of his wife, had stood aloof, distressed and helpless. "It is nothing—the heat of the fire—the sulphur of those detestable coals. Let us all be quiet, and she will be herself again in a moment."

Having assisted the girls to remove her into the adjoining chamber, Verelst returned to receive, with an air of stupefaction, the adieus of Basil, who, conscious that his presence at such a moment might be importunate, hastened to withdraw.

It was dusk when Basil emerged from the house, and a desolate winter rain was falling in torrents, splashing into the overflowing kennels, and almost obscuring the light of the lamps. As the young guardsman reached the junction of the small street in which

Verelst's house was situated with South Audley-street, in attempting to muffle himself in his cloak, to resist the driving rain, he encountered what, at the first shock, he conceived to be the lamp-post.

But, on recoiling, he found that, in addition to the lamp-post, he had struck against an individual combating the gusts of wind with a disabled umbrella. Something irresistibly ludicrous in the dilemma of his brother in distress attracted his attention to the struggling wayfarer, when lo! by the light of the lamp, he recognised the marked and well-remembered features of the Money-lender.

The encounter was untimely; but Basil would not shrink from recognising the man by whom he had been so greatly obliged.

"We have untoward weather for our walk," said Annesley, lending his assistance to reverse the obstinate resistance of the reeking cotton umbrella.

"Unpleasant enough; and *you*, who walk for pleasure, might methinks spare your pains for a happier moment," rejoined the harsh voice of Abednego.—"With *me*, the case is different."—

"Different indeed; since you have the means of commanding any sort of equipage you please, while I have at my disposal only that enjoyed by our father Adam,"—replied Basil, laughing.

"And how long should I enjoy the means, pray, were I to lavish them on costly equipages?" rejoined the Money-lender. "Not a year,—not a month, perhaps,—were I tempted into such ridiculous prodigality.—I might be reduced to the same beggarly shifts which bring so many fine gentlemen shuffling—nay, all but begging—to my door. For whether people beg for a loan, or a gift, where lies the difference?—They are still beggars.—Are you bound for St. James's, young sir? If so, we may become a mutual benefit. Your arm is strong enough to hold up the umbrella; and by taking mine, we may share it between us. Don't be afraid!—In such weather as this, none of your fine friends will be astir.—No one will recognise the gallant Mr. Basil Annesley cheek-by-jowl with A. O."

"It is no such consideration—" Basil was beginning.

"Come on then, and make an end of the discussion," interrupted Abednego, practically enforcing his advice. "Satisfy your scruples by having a second time rendered service to a man more than ready to render service to *you*."

Partly carried away by his companion's vehemence, and partly curious of further insight into his eccentric character, Basil suffered himself to be disposed of. In another minute, he found himself sole occupant of the wet flagstones with the mysterious Abednego.

"But surely, sir, at your age," said he, by way of renewing the conversation, "personal comfort must be a greater object than the amassment of mere wealth?"—

"Who is to determine a man's notions of personal comfort?"—cried the Money-lender. "And what do you mean by *mere* wealth? *My* notion of personal comfort is independence of hirelings, whether man or beast; and as to wealth, what is there in this world beyond it?—What else controls the march of empires,—the progress of civilization,—the development of science,—the

cultivation of art?—What but money causes the crucible to glow,—sinks the shaft,—launches the balloon into the sky—or plunges the diving-bell into the depths of the ocean?—Of what metal is composed the key of the poet's imagination—the orator's eloquence—the physician's skill—the divine's zeal and fervour?—Of gold, sir—of current gold!—He who hath *that*, commands kings on their thrones, or philosophers in their cabinets. Talk not to me of the refinements of art. If I want to enjoy them, I buy up both art and artists—an orchestra of musicians—a legion of sculptors or painters. Your capitalist, boy—your capitalist is the only solid sovereign of modern times.—'*Mere* wealth?' quotha—I knew that you were a boy, Basil Annesley, but I did not hold you for a child!"

The young man could scarcely resist a smile at the impetuosity of his companion.

"I perfectly agree with you, sir," said he at last. "But it was by fully estimating the value of money as a means of commanding enjoyment, that I expressed my surprise at your preferring a wet walk to a luxurious carriage."

"Does the sportsman find greater pleasure in the flavour of his game, or the pursuit of the chase?"—demanded Abednego, in a sterner voice. "Have you not strength of mind to figure to yourself the intensity of enjoyment which a man, appreciating the true value of money, may find in the combinations by which he adds thousand to thousand,—ingot to ingot? As the artist whose family you have just quitted," (Basil found it impossible to repress a start) "finds exquisite delight in the progress of a picture by whose perfectionment he hopes to attain profit and fame, does the money-monger glory in the machinery by which his enrichment is accomplished. Even economy—even privation—has charms, when tending towards the achievement of the grand object of his life.—Ay, stripling, abject as it may seem to you, the Money-lender's is a glorious calling. Every minute of my life swells the amount of my possessions. Other men's property diminishes with their span of life; mine, like the evening shadows, grows as the sun goes down. I am a wretch, eh?—a shabby threadbare wretch, with whom a smart officer like *you*, is ashamed to be seen arm in arm? Shabby and threadbare as I seem, I tell you I hold in subjection those of whose acquaintance you are proud—those to whose acquaintance you barely aspire. Your fine ladies come and beg of me,—cajole me—flatter me;—cajole and flatter A. O. in his cobweb-tapestried halls of state.—'*Mere* wealth!'—What, but the wealth I have amassed by trudging in the rain, while others swelter in carriages, brings the Duke of Rochester cringing to my feet, lying and swindling for the means of keeping up his empty state.—His covetings of A. O.'s '*mere* wealth' have converted that man, (created by nature for honour and refinement,) into an equivocating pettifogger.—Ay, sir, you are shocked—you consider my tongue coarse and licentious.—You would plead privilege of peerage against the Money-lender, in favour of the uncle of your fribble acquaintance, young Wilberton."—(Again Basil started.) "But when you have

lived longer, you will come to the same conclusions. And now, good evening to you, Mr. Basil Annesley. For here we are opposite to the Gloucester Coffee-House, within hail of your out-at-elbow, discreditable friends the Maitlands.—Good evening!—I should be as loth as yourself to expose you to the shame of being met skulking in the rain under the same ignominious umbrella with the Barabbas, A. O.!"

CHAPTER IX.

It is difficult for that which is perfectly simple, and genuinely devoid of affectation, to be chargeable with vulgarity.—STEELE.

BASIL ANNESLEY was about to enter the smoking-room of his club, after dinner, when the messenger he had despatched with a few lines to Verelst, to inquire after the state of his wife, brought back a note from Salome; informing him that her mother was not only perfectly recovered from her seizure, but that she insisted upon their keeping their engagement with Madame Branzini.

Instantly relinquishing an enjoyment to which he only resorted when unlikely to find himself shortly afterwards in female society, Basil made the best of his way to his lodgings to dress. In a moment, his heart, previously depressed by his interview with the caustic Abednego, became light as a bird. A whole evening spent in Esther's society, no matter where, was, at present, the brightest prospect this world could offer.

But for this conciliatory influence, the house to which he was about to repair had little charm for Basil. The husband of Madame Branzini was the Neapolitan consul, and the persons resorting to his society were almost entirely foreigners. For though the highest diplomatic class is cordially welcomed into the best English society, nothing less easy than for foreigners, not included in the pomps of the court, to make their way in a country which prides itself on understanding all languages, and speaking none but its own.

Now there is a natural tendency in persons moving exclusively in the circles of fashion to depreciate those with whose faces they are unfamiliar. The great world is of such limited extent, that each of its component parts is known to each, either by acquaintance or sight; and the moment a strange face appears in the privileged crowd, it is regarded with suspicion.

At the house of the Neapolitan consul, *all* the faces were strange to Basil Annesley. Once or twice, he had joined the circle of Madame Branzini, without finding there a single person he had ever seen before; and among them, not above three or four who spoke his language, It is true, there was much to reconcile him o this strangeness; and a man *blasé* with the insipidity of the *beau monde*, might have experienced the greatest relief in contemplating, in place of the pale and faded faces of the belles of fashion, the fine rich glowing beauty of the southern dames, whose frank and courteous manners were as yet untrammelled by the conventional laws of the most formal country in the world.

Italians and Spaniards abounded at the house of Branzini, who had many years officiated at Cadiz as consul for the Two Sicilies; a circumstance that explained the dark and sun-burnt complexion of most of the men whom Basil found assembled in his drawing-room; and who, to his Londonized eyes, had very much the air of opera-singers, or French hairdressers. Though his German education in some degree liberalized his views on such points, a public school and the Guards had not a little inspired him with the prejudice of "a man about town,"—that every individual differing from himself in dress and manner, must be "a snob or a tiger."

All Madame Branzini's guests were consequently "tigers" to Basil, though scarcely one but was distinguished by some talent or accomplishment, endowing him with a name beyond the conferring of king or kaiser. Most of them were men of science, or memorable artists, who had brought letters of introduction to the consul from countries where their abilities procured them those distinctions which England is so tardy in bestowing upon men of genius.

Still, the form of their beards and whiskers, the cut of their coats, the nature of their salutations, rendered them ridiculous or disgusting in the eyes of Basil; and he had scarcely patience, on entering the circle, to find several of these "foreign fellows" devoting their attentions to the beautiful daughters of Verelst.

For then came the vexatious reflection, that *this* was the natural sphere of Esther;—that, even if these olive-hued individuals *were* the opera-singers to which he so flightily compared them, they belonged to the same order of society as the girl he loved.

Yet *who* could gaze upon that well-turned head, those Grecian features, that exquisite form, every movement of which was grace, and believe them created for any other than the noblest order of society?—No! such women as the Maitlands were not worthy to tie the sandal of Verelst.

She was indeed a being of superior nature. Peculiar elegance of mind served to animate and govern her peculiar elegance of person. Yet in spite of her rare endowments, the spirit of the gifted girl was as meek and humble, as if she possessed no trace of personal distinction. Timid almost to a fault, Esther was content to remain perpetually in the shade. In her own estimation, she was less than nothing, and her chief object in life was to occupy the attention of others as little as she occupied her own. Never did there exist a human being more unselfish.

But for the passionate attachment of her sister, who gloried in her charms and talents, Esther might often have succeeded in causing herself to be overlooked, where presumptuous mediocrity was crowned with laurels. Salome, however, thought for her, felt for her, acted for her, was vain for her; and insisted on her being heard and seen, when Esther had chosen to retire into some obscure corner. It was Salome who was at the trouble of dressing her, so as to enhance, as far as their limited means would allow, the character of her beauty; and as her sister's good taste restricted the utmost of these efforts to a well-fitting muslin dress, and her fine black hair twisted after the model of some antique bust, the unpretending Esther offered no resistance. She was seldom at the

trouble of looking in the glass, indeed, when the task of her affectionate handmaiden was at an end. Beloved in her own family, secure in the friendship of one whom she believed to be superior to external attractions, it was indifferent to *her* whether her dress were more or less becoming than usual.

It was this very absence of pretension, that constituted the great charm of Esther Verelst. She was a patient listener—an indulgent companion; and all who, at a distance, had been struck by her beauty or enchanted by the exquisite charm of her singing, were still more fascinated, when, on a nearer acquaintance, they found that the being thus accomplished thought so little of herself, and so much of the feelings of other people.

Still Basil Annesley, much as he had ever admired in his gentle Esther this complete self-abnegation, considered that she was carrying it too far, when he found her at Madame Branzini's listening deferentially to a "strange-looking man," who was talking Italian to her with earnest volubility.

As he stood opposite contemplating them, he could not help feeling angry at her patience. He felt certain that the dingy, bushy-whiskered stranger was redolent of garlic and cigars; and when he smiled at Esther, and Esther smiled in return, Basil could have annihilated the fellow on the spot,

Verelst, meanwhile, was seated at picquet with an eminent naturalist, his countryman; and Annesley had consequently no means of inquiring the name of this "confounded foreigner." He had been often tempted to regret the secluded life led by the Verelsts, as dull and dispiriting for the girls. He *now* felt that they could not be too much at home. To be exposed to the assiduities of such society as they met at Madame Branzini's, was worse than nothing.

"*Such* society!"—Why *such?*—What did he know about these strangers?—Did he understand their position, their habits, their language? No! he assumed an Englishman's prerogative of disparaging everything and everybody not precisely modelled after his national pattern.

While giving vent in the depths of his heart to his unutterable disgusts, Esther, at the entreaty of her olive-coloured friend, was about to comply with the request of Madame Branzini, for some music. As she passed him closely by to assume her place at the piano, there was time for a momentary greeting.

"Do not, I entreat you, sing the song of this morning!" said Basil, certain of not being understood by those around him; to which request, a reproachful glance from Esther, implying the impossibility of such sacrilege, was the only reply.

With all his prejudice against the individuals composing Madame Branzini's coterie, who, because they did not look precisely like the *good* company he was acquainted with, he decided to be *bad*,—Basil was struck by the good-breeding with which they disposed themselves to do justice to the musician about to exert herself for their entertainment.

In the world with which he was familiar, he had often noticed the air with which the reluctant auditors prepare to disparage what

they are about to hear; and the readiness with which, by their movements and whisperings, they interrupt the performers. But scarcely was the pure, clear, mellifluous voice of Esther Verelst audible in the first bars of that beautiful German melody, the Complaint of Thekla, than a pin might have been heard to fall. There was perfect good faith in their attention. They listened to be gratified and to praise; not to detect errors in order, hereafter,

> To hint a fault, and hesitate dislike;

and by the time the delicate musician had reached the concluding line of her song:—

Ich habe gelebt und geliebet!

every bosom thrilled in delighted unison with the well-defined expression of the songstress.

It was strange that, at that moment, Basil Annesley felt more inclined to applaud the audience, than the performer. He felt almost grateful to them for their attention to Esther. From that moment, the assembly assumed new features in his eyes. He listened more civilly to the speeches of old Branzini; and had the grace to ask the names of two or three handsome women present. He even inquired in French, (the language of the house, as of most foreign houses,) the name of the gentleman who had conducted Esther to the instrument.

"The Duca di San Catalda," was the reply.

"A *Chevalier d'industrie*, I make no doubt,"—was his mental commentary; but on looking round and perceiving that the Secretary of Legation and *attachés* of the Neapolitan mission were present, it was impossible to infer that any person admitted to the house of the venerable consul, more especially a countryman of his own, should be otherwise than respectable.

He was now growing less thankful for the rapture lavished by the party on Esther's performance. Basil had all the waywardness of a lover. The secluded life of the Verelsts secured him from the usual terrors and jealousies of attachment. Go whither he would, absent himself as he pleased, he was sure to find that lovely girl, on his return, installed in her usual place, at her customary occupations; with the certainty that, since their last meeting, her looks, thoughts, or words, had been addressed to no individual qualified to excite his uneasiness. It induced a pang in his bosom, therefore, unfelt since the rehearsal scene of the previous year, to find other eyes fixed upon her beauty, and other courtesies addressed to her ear; and irritated and unhappy, one of the handsomest of human faces became overclouded with ill-humour.

"Our friends are now arrived," observed Madame Branzini, after looking graciously round upon the groups engaged in lively conversation which filled her drawing-rooms—"let us proceed to draw for king."

Accustomed to the forms accompanying in Christmas parties this immemorial custom, Basil was surprised to see no token of the huge frosted cake, covered with bonbons and devices, which usually

tends to sicken, for the remainder of the month of January, the nurseries of well-conditioned English families. Still more was he startled when, (the handsome children of the Branzinis having been desired to commence the ceremonial, whereupon they insisted that the *gâteau des rois* was too heavy to be carried round without the aid of their dear Esther and Salome,) he saw the Verelsts lend their cheerful aid to offer in succession to the guests a huge uneatable *galette* from which every gentleman present was to cut a slice.

As the stranger of the party, the honours were offered first to Annesley; and little Teresa and Cesarino Branzini set up a cry of triumph, when, on examination of his slice of *galette* no bean appeared;—the kingship being decided by the attainment of the fortunate lot containing a *fêve*, or bean, dropped into the cake in the process of making.

In succession, young and old were subjected to the trial; and every new defeat was accompanied by shouts of laughter. In their mirth, however, Basil found it impossible to join. He was thoroughly out of sorts on perceiving that while the attention of the pretendant was fixed upon the *galette* he was cutting, that of the assistants was riveted upon the graceful figures of the two dish-bearers, each worthy to afford a model for a sculptor.

It did not surprise him, so contrary was his mood, when the portion of the Duke of Catalda was pronounced to contain the bean. He had expected it. He felt certain that it was a matter of preference and connivance; more especially when the Duke, his fine face sparkling with joy, presented it to Esther, so as to elect her his queen for the evening.

Universal acclamations followed. Basil Annesley found himself required to offer, among the rest, his homage to their majesties; who, according to custom, proceeded to elect their household and grand officers of the crown. He was more provoked than pleased, when, after naming little Teresa and Salome her ladies in waiting, Cesarino her page, and a merry old gentleman named Clary, (the *precis* writer to the French Embassy,) her almoner, she selected *himself* to be her *Chevalier d'Honneur*.

Few among the party but had been proud to become the knight of Esther. Yet Basil, whose heart was swelling with the newly-experienced torment of seeing the woman he loved in intimate communication with others, would gladly have rejected the distinction. It was no longer with him as in their old childish days in the Neckar-Strasse, at Heidelberg!—He was grown too much a man of the world to enjoy being included in a piece of buffoonery. Most of the company doubled, a few *trebled* his years; yet *he* was the only person too old for the sport.

Probably because the only Englishman present;—the elasticity of spirits which disposes foreigners for enjoyment at any period of life between the cradle and the grave, being either deficient or extinguished in our fastidious nature.

It was not so with the Verelsts. Completely at home in a house where their few intervals of leisure had been spent for two years past (during which Salome had officiated as teacher of German to

the children), they gave themselves up with their little pupils to the joyous spirit of the hour. Elated by the presence of the object of her affections, from whom she had been some days separated, the cheeks of Esther glowed with unusual bloom, as she assumed her place beside the Duke, in the two arm-chairs, with foot-stools, which had been hastily covered with India shawls and velvet mantles, in regal guise, for the reception of the king and queen. Compelled to pledge the healths of the company, who drank to them in return in the exquisite *Lacryma Christi*, for which the cellars of the Neapolitan consul were renowned, she assumed courage to play with grace and spirit the part allotted to her in the pageant.

"What a charming actress Mademoiselle Verelst would make!" whispered the rosy Almoner, old Clary, to Annesley, fancying that he was paying her a judicious compliment: and little suspecting that her *Chevalier d'Honneur* would gladly have stuck him to the heart for the allusion.

While he was meditating an answer not *too* bitter, he found himself plucked by the sleeve by Verelst, whose care-worn face had assumed a holiday aspect under the influence of conquest in a hard-fought game at picquet.

"A word with you, my dear Mr. Annesley," said the old man, drawing him off into a corner; and so conscious was Basil of the evil spirit by which he was at that moment possessed, that he almost expected a reproof for his ill-manners.

"*Where* did you tell me," inquired the artist, when they were out of hearing of the party,—"that you had found that edition of Hollar?"

"I did not *find* it," replied Basil, almost relieved. "It is my own. For the credit of our taste, I am proud to say that the book is a family possession."

"Most strange," murmured the old man.

"*Why* strange?" inquired Basil. "There is nothing, I believe, very rare in the volume. I hardly ever saw a considerable book sale that did not contain a copy."

"Perhaps so; but not *that* copy."

"Of course not. It has been in our family library these hundred years."

"You use the term hundred years in a figurative sense," added Verelst.

"As my own age does not amount to a quarter of the period, I can scarcely give my personal attestation," observed Basil, with a smile. "But such of my mother's books as did not belong to my father's bachelor library, were probably derived from that of her own father, the late Lord L——."

"Lord L——!" exclaimed the painter, again seizing the sleeve of Annesley. "You do not mean to say that *you* are the grandson of that man?"

"Perhaps you knew him?" said Basil, evasively. "He was more than once, I fancy, employed in missions at the courts of Germany."

Verelst was silent, absorbed in reflection.

"Were you acquainted with my grandfather?" again demanded Basil, resolved to obtain an answer.

"I never saw him. Lord L—— was ambassador at Vienna at the breaking out of the French Revolution. I was then a child."

"May I ask, in my turn," inquired Basil, "what particular interest you attach to the copy of Hollar?"

"Five minutes ago, I would have answered you without hesitation," replied Verelst, in a voice tremulous from emotion. "Now, I must reflect. Inscrutable are the ways of Providence!" faltered the artist, after a few minutes' pause. "That ever I should be indebted for what is dearer to me than my life—the welfare of my family—to the grandson of——But no matter," said he, checking his ejaculation. And Basil was too much struck by the distress of the grey-haired artist, to persist in his inquiries. Luckily, he was at that moment summoned to the discharge of his duties, as Lord-in-waiting to the *Reine de la Fêve*, to which he was compelled to attend for the remainder of the night; and, much as his jealous humour had found to cavil at in the easy and cheerful simplicity of Madame Branzini's party, he would gladly have recommenced the evening, when, after taking leave of the Verelsts at the door of their own house, to which he was careful to reconvey them, he proceeded to the more pompous mansion of Lady Maitland.

The party he found assembled in Arlington-street was about the same, in point of numbers and intimacy, he had quitted at the consul's. Nor were the Maitlands and their friends less talkative or less merry; but it was after a fashion of their own. The conversation of that brilliant *coterie* consisted in scandal, and its mirth in irony. The chief source of their gaiety lay at all times in quizzing old Carrington, or some other butt; and as the dowager-colonel did not happen to be present when Basil entered, they were only too happy to attack him with railleries more agreeable to *them* than to himself.

"How dolorous he looks to-night," cried John Maitland, extending a finger to the new comer, but without rising from the sofa on which he was lolling beside a handsome bold-eyed woman of a certain age. "I am afraid, Nancy, (a nickname given to Annesley, among the subs, from his beardless spect on joining the regiment,) I am sadly afraid you have taken cold?"

"On the contrary, it is nearly a degree warmer at Barlingham than in London," replied Basil, referring this abrupt conjecture to his country excursion.

A vociferous laugh was the sole answer to this explanation.

"None of your put-offs, my fine fellow!" cried John Maitland. "Here, Blencowe—Blencowe! I tell Annesley I am afraid he caught cold in the rain this morning, and he tries to hum me by talking about his mother's thermometer!"

Captain Blencowe thus apostrophised, stationed himself on the scroll of the *chaise longue*, in an attitude little more ceremonious than that of his friend.

"I could scarcely suppose my movements of sufficient consequence," said Basil, somewhat nettled, "to make you aware that a few hours after my arrival in town, I had enjoyed a wet walk."

"And in such company," retorted Maitland, "arm-in-arm with an old beggarman, under a cotton umbrella."

"*Reste à savoir*," cried the lady with the bold bright eyes, "which of the two was affording hospitality to the other?"

"If you have any interest in inquiring," said Basil, aware that to defeat a jester is best achieved by meeting him half-way, "the cotton umbrella was the property of my companion, and an enviable property I thought it in that pelting shower."

"He talks as reverentially as if the old gentleman were his grandfather," cried John Maitland.

"I did not know that Nancy *had* a grandfather—*extant*, I mean. (I was not going to parody the vulgar quiz on Brummell.) Of course, I am aware that there was once a Lord L——; and surmise, that a Sir Bernard Annesley was not produced out of a crucible," said Captain Blencowe, watching, from a distance, the impatience with which Lucy Maitland awaited Annesley's release from her brother.

"The old beggarman who appears to have excited your curiosity," said Basil, with some emphasis, "was no relation of mine; but simply a person who obliged me with shelter from the rain."

"From South Audley to St. James's-street," interrupted Blencowe.

"From South Audley to St. James's-street," repeated Basil—and all the more coolly that he was conscious of being in a passion.

"If no relation of yours then, perhaps a relation of the pretty Jewess?" persisted Maitland, also vexed at finding that his jokes were missing fire.

"*What* pretty Jewess?" persisted Basil. "I should think your acquaintance with the Jews likely to be quite as extensive as my own."

"I should have been extremely happy to improve it with the lovely Esther," retorted Maitland; "but you and Carrington, or rather Carrington and *you*, were beforehand with me."

"If you allude to Miss Verelst," said Basil, gravely, "I have once or twice informed you, that she was as much a Jewess as *you* a Christian—that is, in name alone. I am astonished, however, Maitland, that you should allude thus lightly to a lady whom you are anxious to introduce into your mother's house as the preceptress of your sisters."

"Hear, hear, hear, hear!"—cried Maitland, in a voice that attracted the attention of the whole party. "Here is Nancy owning, with matchless audacity, that though only a few hours in town, he has been already examining the engagements of pretty Esther, the opera girl."

"*Is* there an opera girl of the name of Esther?" demanded Wilberton, who having been just elected of the omnibus-box, felt bound to make himself master of its arts and sciences.

"I believe *not*," replied Basil, struggling to command himself; "certainly not, in the person of the young lady to whom Maitland alludes. As he seems resolved to acquaint himself with everybody's business but his own, I am surprised he does not obtain better information."

"My dear Nan!—I am now convinced that the shabby old fellow with the umbrella, whom Blencowe saw you skulking with in Piccadilly, *is* some near relation, or you would not be so deuced touchy

at having been discovered," cried young Maitland, starting from the sofa, and slapping Annesley provokingly on the shoulder.

"If Blencowe *did* see me with the individual in question," cried Basil, harassed out of his self-possession, "I wonder he did not give a more correct account; since the stranger was an acquaintance of *his* long before he became an acquaintance of mine."

"An acquaintance of Blencowe's," cried John Maitland, while Loftus, Wilberton, and several others crowded round, on perceiving, by the tone of the parties, that something was going wrong.

"An acquaintance of Blencowe," persisted Basil Annesley; "and an acquaintance of most of you beside, being no other than the redoubtable A. O."

The silence of consternation instantly pervaded the giddy circle.

Ignorant of the awkward scene in Arlington-street, to which, during his absence in the country, Lady Maitland's friends had been witnesses, Basil was totally at a loss to understand the confusion which appeared to have arisen from an explanation extorted from him by the persecution of the triflers he so little intended to persecute in return.

It was the first time he had seen so astounding an effect result from mere mention of the cabalistic name of A. O.

CHAPTER X.

Not for this
Was common clay ta'en from the common earth,
Moulded by God, and tempered with the tears
Of angels, to the perfect shape of man. TENNYSON.

THE following morning, moved, perhaps, by curiosity to hear as much as was likely to be told by Esther and Salome concerning the Duke of San Catalda without his questioning, Basil, furred to the chin, to meet the nipping blasts of January, (a severe frost having dried the rain of the preceding evening,) made his way towards South Audley-street. He felt intitled to make early inquiries after the health of Mrs. Verelst.

On reaching the house, however, his title was disputed. As if in anticipation of his visit, the maid-servant who opened the door placed a packet in his hand, and informed him that the young ladies were "out," and Mr. and Mrs. Verelst "engaged." The blood mounted into Basil's cheeks at this announcement. It was the first time he had ever found cause to suppose himself too frequent a visitor, there or elsewhere.

He had not advanced many steps from the door, when it occurred to him that the parcel in his great-coat pocket, which evidently consisted of the volume he had left with Verelst the preceding night, might contain a note of explanation. Proceeding, therefore, to a by-street, where he was secure from observation, he opened the packet.

Merely a few cold lines from Verelst.—"I return the book, and regret from my soul that you should have been induced to bring it!" afforded new grounds for vexation and perplexity.—He had evi-

dently given offence to those whom his life was spent in exertions to serve and please; and without having the slightest clue to their grounds for resentment.

Ere he replaced the volume in his pocket, Basil was moved by an irresistible impulse to re-examine the inscription which had so singularly attracted the attention of the artist's family; and his curiosity thus specifically directed towards it, he saw, beyond all question, that the letters A. O. were inscribed in precisely the same handwriting which had embodied his communications with Abednego Osalez.

What could be the meaning of this? He remembered the book in his mother's possession as long as he could remember anything. At what preceding epoch could it have been the property of the Money-lender? That, having been so, it should have passed into the hands of another, was nothing very wonderful; inasmuch as a person with the covetous propensities of Abednego, was likely to dispose of all or anything belonging to him, for a "con-sideration." But that he should have been a buyer or seller at so early an age, as for a book of his to pass into the possession of the late Lord L—, who, if living, would be eighty years old, appeared unaccountable.

As Basil Annesley replaced the volume in his pocket, strange surmises crossed his brain, to which he would have been ashamed to give a more positive form. He had always entertained a mysterious horror of people of Abednego's nation and calling; and though he would have scornfully rebutted the assertion of another that he mistook his Greek-street friend for the Wandering Jew, involuntarily there recurred to his mind the sentence of—"*Thou* shalt tarry till I come!"

"Considering the friendly advice the old fellow gave me last evening, as we were trudging together in the rain," mused Basil, while pursuing the self-same road he had so recently trodden arm-in-arm with A. O., "I am fully intitled to consider him a friend, and treat him as such. I will make the best of my way, therefore, to Greek-street, and ask him, in plain terms, whether the book was ever in his possession. If he should resent my intrusion,—what then? I am not in his power. I have already booked up my interest. He can but give me a gruff answer; and from an oddity like him, a gruff answer is easily endured."

To Greek-street, accordingly, he proceeded, and soon found his way to the well-remembered door.

Alas! huge papers attached to the centre panes of the dining-room windows, announced, in printed capitals—

THIS CAPITAL ROOMY MANSION
TO BE LET,
ON A REPAIRING LEASE.
INQUIRE AT 49, DELAHAY STREET,
WESTMINSTER,
every day from 12 till 2.

"How provoking!" was Basil's involuntary ejaculation, as he stood contemplating the strange contrast of colour between the white paper—to give place to which the panes had been wiped—and the filthy incrustations of the remainder of the windows. As the house, however, appeared equally uninhabited on his first visit, he determined to make an attempt to enter; nor was it till he had knocked and rung several times without effect, that he felt convinced of its abandonment by its strange proprietor. Giving up the point in despair, he proceeded on his way; resolved to visit Delahay Street the following day, at the early hour pointed out by the placard.

He had not proceeded far, however, when a jarring sound induced him to turn his head; when he perceived the door of the deserted house slightly opened, and the face of the dirty old woman peeping out.

In a moment, he was back again; and, having caught the eye of the grim porteress, it was impossible for her to shut the door in his face.

"Is your master at home?" said he.

"Nobody lives here now but *me*," grumbled the old woman. "'Tisn't no fault of mine if I didn't answer the door. The owner of the house don't choose to pay taxes for it no more till it's let, and I live here on condition that I answer no knocks or rings, and don't let myself be seen by the neighbours."

"Mr. Osalez, then, is *really* not at home?" inquired Basil.

The old woman contracted her brows, as if for an effort of comprehension; then drew back the dirty flap of her cap, and screwed her left eye, like a person hard of hearing.

"I inquired whether Mr. Osalez was at home?"

"A. O.'s to be spoke with at No. 49, Delahay-street, Westminster," she repeated, either not knowing, or not choosing to know, the proprietor of the uninhabited house by any other designation. "I would not say as much to a stranger; but I knows *you* has had dealings with him afore, and so I don't mind."

Basil Annesley pointed to the notice in the window, as sparing him all necessity for especial gratitude for her communication, and wished her good morning.

As he made his way towards St. James's-street, in a very different mood from that in which, three weeks before, he had pursued the same track, he could not but revert, with unspeakable irritation of mind, to his repulse at the door of the Verelsts. Never before had he felt so desirous of an interview with Esther. He wanted to inquire the meaning of the artist's letter. He wanted to inquire the nature and standing of their intimacy with the Sicilian Duke. He wanted to tell her that he had never seen her look so lovely, never heard her sing so sweetly, as the preceding night; and he desired this all the more, from feeling certain, in his heart of hearts, that, unimportant as such an attestation might appear to other ears, his approval was essential to the happiness of his own dear, timid Esther.

Like most men of his age, when passionately in love, Basil Annesley found little enjoyment, in either pleasure or business, with which the object of his affections had not some remote connexion.

In spite, therefore, of his intentions of proceeding straight from Greek-street to his club, he found himself, in less than an hour afterwards, at Storey's-gate, contemplating the narrow opening to Delahay-street, and as much cheered in spirits as is usually the result of a walk in frosty weather.

He was now sufficiently acquainted with the eccentric habits of the Money-lender to perceive, without surprise, that the house to which he had been referred was as dilapidated of aspect as the one he had just quitted. It was clear enough that the numerous temporary residences of Abednego consisted of old houses, which he bought up on speculation, and inhabited till a favourable opportunity presented itself of getting them off his hands; and the mansion in Delahay-street, still more "roomy" than the "capital" one abandoned by the Money-lender in Soho, was to all appearance still gloomier and more ruinous. It was of red brick, having five windows in front, with a pretence at pilasters between; the said pilasters being also of brick, with capitals of carved wood-work supporting a heavy cornice, of which the object was doubtful, unless to assist in weighing down the frontage of the attic story to which it was appended, and the peaked, ill-tiled roofing above.

"Truly, an appropriate den for the strange old fellow!" murmured Basil, as he approached the door, to which, contrary to the usage of London houses, it was necessary to descend a step from the street, finished, probably, after the completion of the house; which retained a sort of manorial air of antiquity among its modernized neighbours. He felt almost ashamed of presenting himself, in broad daylight, as a visitor, at a door which, he little doubted, was recognised by the neighbourhood as the den of a money-lending Jew.

In order to excite as little notice as possible, he contented himself with a modest ring at the bell; and so leisurely were the movements of those appointed to answer the summons, that he had time to notice a sort of damp vault-like emanation from the area, which not even the frostiness of the atmosphere could overcome. So stagnant was the air brooding over the flagstones, encrusted in mounds with green moss (now hoary with rime), that it seemed as though any person descending into that deserted area would have been as much in danger of asphyxiation as in some mephitic well.

At length, the door creaked, or rather growled on its hinges; and a starveling of a boy appeared, the redundant growth of whose shock of hair was perhaps destined to replace a general scarcity of habiliments; his outer garments being sufficiently ragged to shew that nothing in the way of shirt interposed between them and his sallow skin.

"I wish to speak to Mr. Osalez," said Basil.

The urchin stared, but made no reply.

"I was referred to this house," persisted Basil, more and more ashamed of himself and his errand,—"from Greek-street, Soho."

"You're after hours!"—said the boy, preparing to shut the door in his face.

"I know it," said Basil, placing his foot so resolutely on the

threshold, as to render the attempt impossible; and at the same moment insinuating a coin into the hand of the boy, which, though sufficiently insignificant to have been flung contemptuously on the pavement by the door-opener of any other house in the street, was so much the most important ever clenched in the palm of the ragged page of the Money-lender, that he stood staring in stupid wonderment, instead of persisting in excluding, or expressing gratitude to the intruder.

"Are you Mr. Osalez's servant?" inquired Annesley, scarcely able to refrain from a smile.

"I'm Bill, as sweeps the George-street crossing," replied the boy, tugging the longest of the elf-locks overhanging his forehead, in token of gratitude to his benefactor. "I runs of errands for the old gemman, and opens the door from noon till two. Only to-day I stayed later, to light a fire and set on the kettle, 'cos the old gentleman's poorly."

"He *is* at home, then?—Be so good as to carry up this card, and say I am waiting to speak to him,"—said Annesley.

Thus certified of the claims and good intentions of the visitor, the boy invited him into the hall, while he proceeded to do his errand; and while the little sweeper, leaving his heavy shoes at the bottom of the square creaking staircase, shuffled up stairs, Basil stood contemplating the dark but roomy hall paved with black and white marble, which by dirt and friction, had now degenerated into gray and yellow; besides being cracked in many of the lozenge-shaped squares, and in others, sunk into the flooring. In the angle formed by the dingy staircase, stood an old sedan chair, dropping into decay and covered with mildew; yet retaining in its gilt mouldings tokens of aristocratic emblazonment.

Shuddering with cold, and the depression produced by the gloom of a spot into which the daylight of that narrow street struggled imperfectly through the half-shuttered windows, Basil waited impatiently till the barefooted boy shuffled down again.

"Master 'll see you,—you may walk up!"—said Bill, pointing upwards with his thumb, while resuming his shoes; having done which, he disappeared towards the basement floor, leaving Basil to find his way unescorted to the presence of Abednego Osalez.

Concluding that he had only to follow the custom of morning visits, and enter the drawing-room, Basil walked leisurely up and opened the door that presented itself on the first landing. But with all his cognizance of the peculiarities of his host, he was not prepared for the scene that presented itself within.

The drawing-rooms, though low, and rendered apparently lower, as in many old-fashioned houses, by a ceiling overlaid with ornaments and divided into compartments by beams of carved woodwork, were unusually spacious. Yet spacious as they were, not an alley presented itself by which Basil could penetrate into the interior, without the certainty of covering himself with dust and cobwebs, by collision with the heterogeneous objects crowded into the area;—pieces of antiquated furniture, articles of *virtù*, besides a variety of indescribable things, which looked as if assembled by a hasty removal in a fire or the sacking of a town, thirty years

before, and abandoned ever since to the dust-gathering and smoke-gathering operations of Time.

Heaped on the floor, in one corner of the room, like potatoes in a barn or beans in a granary, lay the contents of a library; from their rich old bindings apparently valuable, but overgrown with dust and mould, like the bricks of some ruined pile. To the left of the door, on entering, stood a fine marble copy of the *Venus de Medicis*, which the prudery of the spiders had covered with draperies of black cobwebs, that hung like draperies to the very pedestal.

Further on, was the Whetter, in bronze, on whose dark surface, on the contrary, the coating of dust, in ledges, assumed a lighter colour; and beyond, in all directions, were slabs of *pietra dura* slanting against rich consoles of carved ebony, and bas-reliefs in *rosso antico* and other precious marbles, side by side with tawdry French clocks, Dresden cups, and Nankin vases; groupings of stuffed birds, which, by the fracture of their glass-cases, and the admission of the atmosphere, had sacrificed their bright plumage to the moths; so that only the shrunken skin or skeleton stuffed with straw, and staring glass eyes, remained perceptible.

Crystal girandoles stood on the consoles, so encrusted with dust as to have lost all symptom of transparency; while of a magnificent copy of Correggio's Notte, that stood frameless against a japan cabinet, the rats had gnawn off a corner. There was a species of altar with folding wings, such as are used for the travelling devotions of crowned or mitred heads, adorned with chasings, the work of Cellini or one of his pupils, which, though evidently of silver, was tarnished to the tint of bronze.

Never before had Basil Annesley contemplated so singular a waste of property. But that these precious objects were intermingled with trays of old iron, rolls of lead, and fragments of packing-cases, he would have compared this singular museum to the *bric-à-brac* shops he had visited on the Quai Voltaire at Paris, or in the Juden Gasse at Frankfort; saving that, in these, though the chaos of valuable works of art was quite as confused, the strictest cleanliness was observed to preserve from injury the component objects.

After a deliberate survey of the room, a glance at the coating of dust through which the colouring of a parqueted floor, now so rare in London, was faintly perceptible, convinced him, that for some time past, no foot but his own had crossed the threshold. He must pursue elsewhere his search after the proprietor of the extraordinary treasury he had invaded.

Closing the door carefully after him, he ascended another flight of stairs, and again opened the first door facing the landing. But the result was nearly the same as on the first; with the exception that the warehouse of curiosities on the second floor appeared exclusively devoted to the reception of pictures.

"My friend the Jew has evidently a taste for lodging as near as possible to the sky!" thought Basil, proceeding to the attic story; and as he noticed the increase of light and decrease of density in the humid atmosphere while continuing to ascend, he came to a

conclusion, that, were *he* a lodger in the old house in Delahay-street, he should follow the example of its proprietor.

The door that now faced him on the landing was slightly ajar, as if purposely left so by the ragged page, by way of indication. Basil tapped lightly, to warn the inmate of his approach, and a hoarse whisper instantly bade him "come in."

Before a smoking fire, composed of small coal and shavings, the crazy grate containing which emitted the stifling effluvia peculiar to rusty iron, in an old-fashioned *bergère* covered with the ragged remains of a rich brocade, (which, in the days of Queen Anne and of the sedan-chair below, had probably supported the graceful limbs of many a court beauty,) sat the Money-lender, enrobed in a faded but magnificent wrapper of velvet and sables; looking, with his strongly-marked features and picturesque costume, as though sitting for his picture to Rembrandt.

"I am afraid your wet walk has had a worse influence on *you*, sir, than on myself?" said Basil, struck by the hoarseness of the tones in which the old man attempted to inquire his business.

"A slight sore throat,—nothing more!" grumbled Abednego; "easily cured with a quarter of an ounce of gum-arabic and a pint of hot water; half the price of a hackney-coach fare. What do you want with me?"

"So little," replied Basil Annesley, seating himself on a rickety straw-chair opposite the invalid, "that I would by no means have troubled you had I imagined you were indisposed."

"Then why come at all?" demanded the Money-lender, with surly abruptness.

"I came to ask you an idle question. You were in such perfect health, when we parted yesterday evening, that I had no expectation of being so much an intruder as I find myself to-day. I have been as far as Greek-street in search of you."

"Do *you* want to take the old house on a repairing lease?" inquired Abednego, with a sneer. "You imagine, perhaps, that some of the money-bags of A. O. may be overlooked in the old cupboards and odd corners?"

"I have no views on your money-bags, Mr. Osalez, excepting such as you have found me very frank in declaring," replied Annesley, with a degree of steadiness that did him no disservice with one accustomed to be addressed in terms of subservience.

"Your question, then, I am to conclude, simply regarded the state of my health?" retorted the Money-lender, the wrinkles which had puckered the corners of his keen eyes into a sarcastic expression, gradually relaxing.

"Still less. I never saw a person more robust than my companion of last night. I merely wished to ask whether you could give me any information concerning a volume in my possession, which bears on the title-page your initials, inscribed in your own hand-writing?"

"I should be somewhat puzzled, I fancy," replied Abednego, with a hoarse chuckle, "to give you precise information concerning all the varieties of property which, one way or other, have passed through my hands. I buy whatever I can buy cheap, and sell it

whenever I can sell it dear. The fools *from* whom I purchase, or who purchase from *me*, are of no more account in my eyes than one of the atoms of dust which your coat has imbibed by your recent visit to my lumber-rooms."

Following the indication of the old man's skinny finger, pointed towards him, Basil perceived that his scrupulously neat dress bore unsatisfactory traces of the filmy drapery of the Venus de Medicis.

"With such feelings," resumed Abednego, on perceiving that his young visitor evinced no fastidious tokens of disgust at the misadventure which had befallen him, "I do not often set my mark on those temporary belongings. A book in which I ever inscribed my initials, must have been a book I valued."

"You can scarcely have failed to value a work so interesting as *this!*" replied Basil, drawing from his pocket the volume he had brought from Barlingham for the amusement of Verelst, and placing it before Abednego, so as to bring the inscription under his eyes.

To his utter surprise, the effect produced on Osalez by the sight, was scarcely less remarkable than that which it had wrought in the mother of Esther. The old man fell back in his chair, and for a moment appeared to gasp for breath; while Basil sat watching him with uneasy consternation.

"That boy takes as long to boil my hot water, as a chemist to compound a medicine," were the first words that burst from the quivering lips of Abednego, as if in apology for his emotion; "yet I told him I was choking with my sore throat!"

"Will you give me leave to ring, sir?" said Basil, perceiving that his singular host was desirous of evading his observation.

"I give you leave to find a bell, if you are able!" retorted the old man, as though priding himself on the denuded condition of his habitation. "No, no! *no* bells here, my fine captain, nor menials to answer them. No knaves in showy liveries, like those who held the great-coat on your back for you, last night, at my Lady Maitland's, who have received no wages save their pickings and stealings these two years past! If there were indeed such a thing in this old house as an unbroken bell-wire, it would serve only to frighten the rats, who are as much masters here as myself. I have no servant, except the beggar-boy who showed you in."

"And do you consider such an unprotected state safe, sir, with such an amount of property in the house?" inquired Basil, wishing to give him time to recover his first surprise, ere he renewed his inquiries.

"The half-starved terrier I let loose at night, is a better guard than a troop of the household brigade!" replied Abednego; who had thrust the volume aside on the table, as if not choosing to encounter a second view.

"But even if the dog gave the alarm, in your infirm state—"

"This is the first day's illness I have had these twenty years; and you may perceive that I am prepared to take care of myself," interrupted the old man, suddenly opening the drawer of the table beside him, and taking out a brace of pistols, on half cock, which

he quietly replaced, having evidently exhibited them to reassure, not to intimidate his guest.

"Besides, the police have their eye on my house. I have *them* in fee, as I have the insurance offices, as a matter of business."

"But the discreditable urchin who waits upon you—"

"Regards me as little better than a beggar. Where a half-starved brat sees an empty larder, he beholds only misery and want. The *chef-d'œuvres* you saw just now in my drawing-room have less intrinsic value in his eyes than a sirloin of beef in an eating-house window. Bill the sweeper pities me, sir—pities me, as a poor old man, almost as much a pauper as himself."

"He may some day come into contact with people able to enlighten him," observed Basil, gravely. "May I ask, sir, whether you have any recollection of the book beside you?"

"You got it from your mother!"—said Abednego, as if started into the rejoinder.

"You sold it to her then?" demanded Basil, anxious to account for his knowledge of the fact. But at the word Abednego half started from his chair, as if smitten with a sore and sudden pain. In a moment he recovered himself.

"Nay; I only so concluded by force of inference," said he. "A taste for the works of Holbein and Hollar appeared more appropriate to an accomplished woman than to a gay guardsman. Perhaps you wish to dispose of the book?"

"I am not, thank God, so straitened, even by the imprudences which have rendered me your debtor," said Basil, proudly, "as to be driven to the sale of my mother's property, or even of property derived from her. I merely wished to account to myself for the inscription of your initials on the title-page."

"The initials of A. O. have, I admit, obtained strange notoriety by my means," said Abednego. "Nevertheless, you cannot suppose me to be the only individual who has ever borne them?"

"Scarcely," replied young Annesley. "But these letters are distinctly of your own tracing."

"Are you so expert in handwriting as to swear to that?" demanded Abednego, abstaining, however, from a glance towards the book again officiously placed before him by Basil. "My dear young friend, take my advice, and neither perplex your brains with surmises on subjects that little concern you, nor by inferences arising out of idle coincidences, which the inexperience of boyhood conceives to be pregnant with meaning. You are surprised, for instance, that I am tolerably well acquainted with your movements, and the movements of people so much out of my sphere of life as Lord Maitland's wife. A moment's reflection ought to convince you that a portion of the Money-lender's business is to obtain the most accurate information concerning the spendthrifts of the day. I look upon all such as constituting my flocks and herds—as much my property as the physician regards the gouty lord lolling past him in his chariot, or the undertaker the hectic wretch he hears coughing at the street corner."

"It may be your business to seek such information; the wonder lies in your obtaining it," observed Basil.

"*All* information may be had for money," rejoined Abednego, rubbing his lean hands with an air of exultation. "*Everything* is to be had for money, if applied with the same intelligence that gathered it together. Look at me, Mr. Annesley. Did you ever see a more loathsome scarecrow?"

And, as he spoke, the Jew raised from his head the Greek cap, embroidered with tarnished gold lace, by which its bald crown was covered, as if to give greater expansion to his ugliness.

"Ay, smile, sir! You are too civil to confirm the ungracious verdict of a man who sees himself as he sees all things else in this world, in the clear and searching light of truth. But I tell you that, unsightly as I am, women, both young and fair, cajole me with their courtesies,—I would say caresses. But that you must be an eye-witness of the fact—to have faith for disproportion so monstrous—look ye here!—this tawdry thing," said he, pointing to the cap, which he now replaced upon his head, "was worked for me by the white hands of a countess; and, if I chose it, she is ready to embroider a dozen such—nay, to place them with her aristocratic fingers upon the grey head of the old Money-lender."

"For which subjection to your will, you despise her!" said Basil, with indignation.

"I despise her, because the necessities that bring her cringing to my feet arise from the wantonness of folly—nay, the wantonness of *crime;* for in a wife and mother folly becomes as criminal as vice! This woman must shine, forsooth, and glitter, and dazzle, by the splendour of her entertainments and fashion of her dress. Why? Because she is *proud*—because she has the ambition of being cited for her distinction of looks and manners. And what is the result of her pride and her distinction? That she is made to crawl in all the indigence of extravagance to the knees of A. O., the Money-lender, and beg him, with tears in her eyes and prayers upon her lips—nay, more than prayers, if I were brute enough to profit by her subjection—to take pity upon her necessities. You doubt this? Read, read! It may be treachery for a lover to exhibit the letters of a fond and trusting woman. It is none for the Money-lender to betray the correspondence of a thriftless customer."

And, snatching a pen from the old leaden inkstand beside him, and passing it hastily through the signature of a letter, which, while speaking, he had taken from an envelope lying on the table, he presented it to Basil.

"Remark the countess's coronet on the seal," said he, "and admire the delicacy of the handwriting, and elegance of the paper, in confirmation of my assertion, ere you peruse the abject pleadings of this fashionable bankrupt."

Basil Annesley shuddered as he read; for every line and every syllable adduced horrible confirmation of Abednego's assertions.

"You knew not half the advantages of my calling,"—cried the old man, laughing with feeble triumph at the air of consternation that overspread the countenance of Basil, under the influence of one of those painful discoveries which tend to shake our confidence in human nature. "Till now, you regarded the old beggar of Paulet-street s the crazy proprietor of a warehouseful of worm-eaten curio-

sities, left in deposit by his customers, of a few crazy houses, and perhaps a few floating thousands lent out on infamous usury. Ha! ha! ha! ha! You would give worlds, boy,—*worlds*, for a thousandth part of my influence and authority.—Preferment and promotion lie in the bureau of the Money-lender.—I command most of those who command the destinies of the kingdom. I have princes, ministers, bishops, among my debtors; your highflying orator, your rhapsodizing author;—fellows who, upon the hustings, or in the House, get up and speechify upon virtue, honour, honesty: but whose shallow consciences are not the less admeasurable by certain shreds of parchment, called bonds, which I hold in my possession.—There are few things they dare refuse me. As war-making kings tremble under the governance of Rothschild, under *mine*,—under the control of A. O. shivering in his garret,—abide more than one, two, or three of those to whom you uncover your head reverentially as you pass. You saw me keep the Duke of Rochester dancing attendance at my gate.—As much, and more also, have I done to men having the blood-royal of England in their veins."

The spirits of Basil were overpowered by the vehemence of excitement gradually enkindled in the old man's frame by the progress of discussion. He almost feared that Abednego must be under the influence of fever, to become thus strangely communicative.

"Open yonder bureau," said the Money-lender, extending his skinny finger to one clamped with iron, which stood beside his comfortless bed.

And Basil almost mechanically obeying, beheld within, in separate compartments, piles of rouleaus, such as he had already seen in the secretaire in Greek Street, besides a variety of morocco-cases.

"Bring me a handful of those baubles. Or, stay—you know not the ways of the place," he continued, tottering from his chair, till he stood beside Annesley, leaning on the bureau, of which he opened a secret drawer. "Look here! these are a duchess's diamonds. I hold them in pledge while *she* appears at the right hand of the throne, in trinkets of paste. These sapphires are the property of a banker's wife, who pretends to have grown '*serious*,' as a pretence for abjuring the use of jewels;—because, deceitful jade, her own are in the keeping of A. O.—But this—*this* is my crown of glory!" chuckled the Money-lender, bringing forth a small round case, containing a bracelet of brilliants. "Do you see this miniature? Six years only have elapsed, since the proud and happy young lord it represents, placed it on the arm of his bride. He has been three years in his grave, and the miniature is mine! The tinsel of fashion by which the widow is trying to bewilder another silly victim into wedlock is procured with means of my supplying. She broke the heart of her first husband by her extravagance. It may not be easy to find another ready to be heart-broken."

"Surely you had better rest yourself again, Sir, in your easy-chair," said Annesley, eager to avoid these hateful revelations. —"Pardon me, if I own that I am by no means anxious to see the veil uplifted from the deformities and defeatures of my fellow-creatures."

"I have, nevertheless, too deep a stake in your well-doing, not to afford you the means of discriminating between the sheep of the flock, and the wolves in sheep's clothing," said the Money-lender, as he double locked the bureau, and retreated to his seat. "Admit," said he, gathering more closely around him the robing of his furred symar, (which might have served a theatrical Doge of Venice, or Grand Pensionary of Holland,) "admit that, if I chose to deny myself the daintiness of being drugged by a fashionable apothecary, and dawdled over by a canting housekeeper, it is not for want of means to keep such reptiles in my pay?"

"Which makes me only the more regret, Sir, your obstinate discomfort," replied Basil, beginning to survey the squalid wretchedness of the millionary, as the crotchet of a maniac. "You are ill —*more* ill, perhaps, than you imagine; and left here all night alone, (for even the boy, I conclude, quits you at night,) alone, with gnawing rats for companionship, to fight against fever and suffocation, you may have cause to repent your rejection of the means of care and comfort, secured by your ample fortune."

"I have been left alone with worse things than gnawing rats, even with my own bitter and gnawing thoughts, and yet struggled through the trial," said Abednego. "You pity me, young man, for risking to be stifled by a quinsy, when I might hire some frowsy old woman to sit up with me, whose gripe upon my throat at midnight, were a worse peril than my disease. Basil! had you ever experienced the heart choking that suspends the impulses of life—under a sense of the contumely of those you love,—had you ever felt the fever that throbs in the burning veins, when disparaged by the idol of your tenderness,—the woman for whom you would have perilled every hope of your soul, in this world, and the world to come,—had you seen the fools, the knaves, whom you despise with the full force of your vigorous intellect, the warm fervour of your generous heart, triumphing over your defeat, and asking how such as you presume to form pretensions to the smiles of beauty, *you* with nothing to recommend you but youth, ardour, mind, cultivation, honour, truth, and treble the enjoyments of the lordly home from which you desire to remove the object of your love to the temple where you would have served her as a slave; —had you known all this, Basil Annesley—had you felt those contemptuous looks eating like caustic into your flesh—had you heard those insulting words piercing like poisoned arrows into the marrow of your bones,—you would have been content to live as I do, apart from the titled herd, apart from the rapacious crew, despising alike the hirelings for bread, and the hirelings for vanity; alone, independent,—brooding over the sense of a mighty wrong, and anticipating the triumph of a mighty revenge."

"All this I could perfectly understand," replied young Annesley, steeling himself against the awe with which he was beginning to listen to what appeared to be the rhapsodies of a lunatic, "provided your privation tended towards the accomplishment of aught beyond your personal inconvenience. But what enemy of yours will be the worse for your remaining this bitter night destitute of attendance and medicaments?"

"They will be the worse for the results of a system of which

these hardships form a part," replied Abednego, in a gruffer voice, as if exhausted by his recent outburst. "I discern, by the growing superiority of your glance, young man, the contempt kindling in your soul towards my short-sightedness. You recal to yourself the words of the Psalmist: 'He heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them!' *I* know—*I* know, Basil Annesley—and I glory in knowing. He who gathers them will shed coals of fire upon those who—But no matter. What care *you* for the burning injuries or burning revenge of the old Money-lender?"

"I shall care much more, Sir, to know that you are lying here devoid of the necessaries of life, while *my* pillow has been smoothed by your kindness," replied Basil, mildly. "But I cannot offer you my aid. I cannot *now* ask you to accept the services of a faithful servant of my own; because, in the instance of others, you have shown me that you consider such acts of kindness to be interested and mercenary."

"Not from one so young and guileless as *you!*" burst in a hoarse murmur from the parched lips of Abednego. "Be satisfied! It would make me far more uncomfortable to have my poor old dwelling ransacked by the curiosity of strangers, than to lie here conscious that the javelin of death is at my breast, and that there is none to close my eyes if the Grim One gets the best of it!—I want no prying Jacks to spy out the nakedness of the land, or its abundance; to exult over my empty cellar, or covet my brimming coffers. There is less peril, Basil Annesley; in the quinsy which, as you perceive, is gradually thickening my voice and filming my eyes, than in the malice of the cut-throats with whom your rascal in livery might league himself, on the temptation of the wealth that lies ensconced in this old seeming rat-hole, richer of contents than the palace of Aladdin. But you pretend a desire to do me a service," said he, half interrogatively.

Annesley answered not a word; and the Money-lender was forced to reiterate his question.

"I *pretend* nothing," replied Basil, coldly,—"I pity your infatuation—I pity your abandonment; and would fain induce you to take pity on yourself."

"I repeat that you just now tendered me offers of service. If sincere, and your good-will be not a mere pretence, confer an obligation on me by giving me this volume," said Abednego, striking his bony hand on the copy of Hollar, lying on the table.

"I cannot do *that*," replied Basil, in a decided tone, "for it is not mine to give. It is the property of my mother."

The piercing glance of Abednego peered from under his bushy eyebrows, and fixed itself scrutinizingly on his face.

"How comes it, then, in your possession?" said he.

"I arrived yesterday morning from Barlingham Grange, where she resides," replied Annesley, firmly, "and brought it with me."

"Without her knowledge?"

"Without her knowledge," replied the young man, in a less assured voice. But the admission appeared less to provoke the contempt than the satisfaction of his singular companion. A ray of joy twinkled in his deep-set eyes.

"And what *tempted* you to bring it with you?" inquired Abednego, with persevering curiosity.

"I wished to show it to a friend, to whom, as a curious work of art, I thought the sight might be advantageous," replied the harassed guest.

"That is, you wanted to conciliate the blind old father of Esther Verelst," added the Money-lender, while the colour mounted to the temples of the astonished Basil.

"Do you mean me to believe you in league with Satan, as well as the comptroller of half the destinies of London?" cried he, losing all self-possession.

Abednego laughed aloud at this apostrophe; and the huskiness of his voice was now painful to hear.

"You go far out of your way, young sir," said he, "to account for my participation in the household secrets of a needy artist. Is it so *very* marvellous that I—A. O. the Money-lender—should be aware that the sum of money raised so rashly at my hands, was devoted to meet acceptances which had their origin in the embarrassments of that wrong-headed ass, Verelst, the painter?"

Basil Annesley now fairly started from his seat.

"Somewhat an onerous requital," persisted Abednego, with a sneer, "for a few cups of lindenwasser bestowed upon you during your illness at Heidelberg, and a few lessons in crayons!"

"Mr. Osalez," Basil was beginning,—but Abednego persevered in a louder key—"You fancy," he continued, "that it would go to the stubborn heart of Lady Annesley, to know that a book of hers had fallen into the hands of an obscure, money-lending, miserly, contemned, and outcast Jew. But I tell you, young gentleman, that, haughty as she is, her blood would rise to fever heat, did she know that her only son, the son of her pride, if not of her affection, had pledged his heart, and meditated pledging his hand, to the daughter of a starving artist, and the grand-daughter of——no matter—*Her* scorn and her humiliation are no affair of mine.—But here comes my brew of diet-drink," cried he, as the dirty urchin, carrying a jug of hot water peeped into the room: "and the more welcome, that my throat is parched with talking.—So no more to-day, Mr. Annesley.—Untempting as my bed may look to *you*, I am cowardly enough to feel that my old bones will be the better for it.—Farewell! If you have consistency enough to care two days hence for the ailment that paints such compassion in your looks at this moment, pr'ythee come and see whether Death or A. O. have fought the better fight,—Till then, surely, you will entrust to my hands a volume so replete with instruction as this?" said he, again laying his hand upon the book, which Annesley had no pretext for refusing as a loan.

Almost before he knew what he was about, he had been unconsciously dismissed by the Money-lender; and was standing on the pavement of Delahay Street, listening to the bolting and barring, and putting up of the rusty chain within, by Bill the sweeper.

Basil had not resisted Abednego's commands, that the boy should follow him down to open the door; for he thus secured an opportunity to enforce, by a second bribe, his charge to the uncouth page

on no account to leave the invalid that night; but to be in readiness to receive the medicines and instructions he was proceeding to despatch from the shop of a neighbouring chemist.

CHAPTER XI.

Thou shak'st, old man! Are thy limbs palsied?—No.
'Tis not old age,—'tis not disease,—'tis not
Inclemency of cold thus troubles thee!
It is the ague of a tortured heart,
That not e'en time can med'cine!—MASSINGER.

NEVER had Basil Annesley installed himself before the fire of his lodgings in so desponding a mood as after his interview with Abednego. Not a single point or person whereon he could fix his thoughts with complacency, by way of relief. After a visit to his mother, in which he had been made to feel himself an unwelcome guest, after becoming an ear-witness to the ravings of the old gardener, which he would have given worlds to efface from his memory, he had been spurned from the door which he had a right to approach as a benefactor, and where he would nevertheless have been proud to kneel in all the self-sacrificing humility of love.

His mother he knew to be exposed to the most harassing and painful duties. The family of Verelst appeared to be distracted by some peculiar contrariety of fortune, of which he was unable to surmise the origin. And now, his benefactor, the man for whom, involuntarily, he entertained at once the greatest interest and greatest contempt, was suffering from a dangerous disease. In neither of the three cases could he exercise a beneficial influence. Gladly would he have dedicated all the means at his command, to alleviate the pangs of any of the three. But he was powerless as a child. All he could do was to sympathize in silence, and at a distance.

To say that no floating visions of the Duca di San Catalda mingled with his many vexations, would be disengenuous. It was doubtless no small enhancement to the miseries of his position that, while excluded from the house of Verelst, he believed another to be favoured with access;—another, rich and powerful; able to confer favours fifty times greater than the poor services he had rendered, and perhaps to make them acceptable by graces of deportment in which he felt himself to be lamentably deficient. In the depths of his reverie, poor Basil seemed to behold passing before him, as in a dream, all that was occurring at Barlingham, all that was chancing in the drawing-room of Verelst, all that was exercising a fatal empire in the miserable attic of A. O.

So irritated was his mind by these perplexities, that he felt unequal to the exertion of dining at mess; and he accordingly determined to take an early dinner at the Clarendon, and proceed to the play; the resource of homeless men in London against the publicity of their Club or loneliness of their lodgings.

Now the play, in the month of January, is as habitual a resort of

fashionable loungers as it is secure from their presence the moment the season commences. Scarcely had Basil taken a back seat in one of the public boxes, leaning back with folded arms, for the unmolested enjoyment of his reflections, when an unusual degree of movement and conversation in one of the private boxes attracted his notice; and he perceived that it was tenanted by a party of his brother officers, Loftus, Blencowe, and Maitland, the old boy Carrington, and young boy Wilberton, precisely those whom others would have designated as his friends.

This was vexatious; for Loftus had invited him to dine with them and join a party to the Adelphi, and they would now perceive that the engagement he had pleaded was a subterfuge to avoid them. For he rightly conjectured that the unusual vociferation in their box was produced by their discovery of his entrance, and ejaculations of indignation at his desertion.

He was, consequently, as little at his ease at the theatre, as he would have been at home. To his disturbed thoughts, the eyes of the merry party seemed constantly upon him. He fancied them still pursuing the system of quizzing which had irritated him the preceding night into the unlucky explanation, the full force of embarrassments arising from which had been demonstrated to him by the officiousness of Carrington, on his way from Arlington Street to the Club.

It was, perhaps, because annoyed by the sort of Inquisition to which he felt himself exposed, (for the laughers had the advantage over him in point both of position and numbers,) that, the moment the curtain dropped upon a tragedy composed of glazed calico, gilt paper, glass beads, cotton velvet, twelve flourishes of trumpets, a voice more uproarious in offering "a kingdom for a horse" than all the twelve put together, and a prompter still louder and more active than both the trumpets and tragedian, Basil quitted the theatre. He foresaw that the significant smiles and whisperings they had directed towards him during the courtship of Lady Anne and the mild heroism of Richmond, would have double scope during the tumults of the pantomime.

It was a chilly night. The moonlight lay like snow upon the frozen pavement; and that vivid brightness which, in summer, seems intended to facilitate happier enjoyment than the glare of day, either for the revellers of this world, or those which, unseen and unsuspected, disport themselves impalpably around us, seemed thrown away on a state of atmosphere that drove both man and beast to shelter. There was nothing to tempt forth fay or fairy; the sylph to the moonbeam, the undine to the wave. A few shivering mortals crept despairingly along the streets; or, by a brisker encounter with the cold, attempted to lessen the evil. It was impossible to connect the idea of that frozen moonlight with anything but suffering and discontent.

Even the young blood of Basil was chilled within him; and though, in the course of his musings during the tragedy, he had made up his mind to proceed to Westminster and ascertain that the man whose eccentricities had so enthralled his attention was not wholly without assistance on such a night, yet, on emerging from

the heated theatre into the frosty atmosphere without, his courage failed him.

As he issued from the public door in Bow-street, adjoining the private one, a tiger in livery, with a cockade in his hat, touched it to him, and ran to resume his place in the cabriolet he had abandoned to the care of a brother atom in order to gossip with the footmen in the entry. His attention attracted by this irregularity, Basil perceived that two of the cabs in waiting were those of John Maitland and Blencowe, both of which were always at his orders; and, aware that neither of them would be in request for two hours to come, he jumped into that of the latter, and having hurried as far as the entrance of Delahay-street, desired the lad to drive back to the theatre, and await his master, to whom he was to explain the occurrence. Thus secured from a chilly walk, Basil proceeded, on the opposite side of the pavement, to the house occupied by Abednego, and raised his eyes anxiously towards the attic story.

Not a gleam of light in the windows,—not a token of habitation. The old man might have been left alone and fireless, to wrestle with his disease; nay, he might have sunk under it, united with the inclemency of the weather. It was just possible that the room occupied by the Money-lender might not face the street. But if otherwise, the idea of an old man in a high fever, half suffocated with a quinsy, a disease of all others demanding the watchfulness of an attendant, exposed to the chill of that deserted rat-hole, was, indeed, a picture of desolation.

In spite of the cold, he stood for some minutes wrapt in his cloak, contemplating the quaint old mansion. Then, as if conscious of the absurdity of interfering in the domestic affairs of one to whom he bore so little affinity, and who would probably resent his kindness as importunate or artful, he walked away as far as the corner of the street, on his road homeward. Again, however, his steps were arrested by a sense of the isolated wretchedness of A. O.

"If the old creature should die in the night for want of aid!" murmured he; and, at the supposition, back he hastened to the house, and stepping down to the door, rang gently at the bell.

Basil was prepared to allow the greatest possible latitude for the deliberation of the little sweeper, to whom, in sending the medicines from the chemist's, he had addressed a message, promising a reward on the morrow if he adhered to his promise of not quitting the house. He therefore waited quietly at the door, till he conceived the poor urchin had found time to shuffle up stairs from the heap of shavings in the front kitchen, on which he had promised Basil to pass the night, and visit from time to time the chamber-door of the invalid. When five minutes had elapsed, Basil rang again;—at the end of ten, a third time.—Still, no answer.

Weary of standing in the cold, he began to exercise his personal observations by examining carefully through the area railings whether light were perceptible through the cracks of the shutters; the kitchen, in which Bill had promised to station himself bearing evidence, in the name of "front," of being overlooked by the

street. But the most careful eye could detect no straggling gleam betokening habitation.

"Perhaps the poor boy may have fallen asleep in the cold," mused Basil, drawing his cloak closer about his ears. "If I were to try and wake him?—A stone thrown against the shutter, perhaps, might rouse him up."

But where was a stone to be found on the frozen pavement of Delahay-street!—Though St. James's Park, and all its gravel, lay within distance of a stone's throw, Basil might as well have required an "entire and perfect chrysolite" to fling at the shutter, as a single pebble. After a moment's deliberation, he whistled loudly, in hopes that, if dozing, this signal might reach the ear of the boy.

In an instant, an answering whistle sounded shrilly from the opposite side of the street, and a rough hand was placed upon his collar. Basil started round to grapple with his antagonist, but stopped short on noticing the uniform of a policeman. Ere he had time for explanation, two more ran up to the assistance of the first.

"Hold fast, Bill!" cried one of the new-comers, panting for breath.

"I've been watchin' on him this quarter of a hour," cried the original captor,—"seeing as he'd a heye to the parlour winders o' the old Jew. He's been trying skeleton keys, and what not, at the door.—S'pose we gives the alarm indoors? From his piping up, the chap has maybe got accomplices within."

"Ay, ay, a put-up robbery——".

"Jist the flash-cut iv a Wist-ind burglar!"—cried the third policeman;—all three keeping such fast hold of the collar of Basil, as to leave him scarcely breath for explanations, which, even when made, were utterly disregarded.

"A mighty likely story?—exclaimed the constable from Great George-street, who had now come up, in answer to the summons of his subs.—"Gentlemen which come to inquire after the health of other gentlemen, does not whistle to the footmen down the ary!"—

"Nor try skiliton-kays at the front doore!"—added the third policeman.—

"Besides, the old fellow at this 'ere 'ouse hav'n't e'er a friend as ever anybody hear tell of," observed the original captor;—"and from his anxiousness to have his house watched, I've a notion there's property past common, inside."

"In that case, knock at the door, and give an alarm to have the house searched," said the constable. "B 947, will assist in carrying this fellow to the station-house."

"No assistance will be required. I am quite willing to proceed there," said Annesley, perfectly composed. "But before I go, I should be glad to learn news of the old gentleman who resides here, who is dangerously ill."

The men, who were holding him as tightly as though Jerry Abershaw or Dick Turpin were in their clutches, now inquired with expressive gestures, whether he saw any green in their eyes: to which inquiry, Basil replying by an eager renewal of the request

he had addressed to the constable, B 947, who, apparently less experienced in his calling than the rest, suggested that "no great 'arm 'ud be done by keeping him fast till the door uppened."

"Do you suppose, sir, as I require to be obstructed in my dooty by the likes of *you?*" cried the indignant constable.—"I'm answerable to my super'ors, and that's enough. Carry him off!" cried he, addressing the "infer'ors," with the dignity of a Dogberry—"I'll be after you in a jiffy."

Annesley was accordingly compelled to hurry off between the two policemen, without waiting to hear the result of the alarm at the door of A. O.

He offered no resistance, concluding that his explanations at the station-house would produce his immediate release; and was only vexed to perceive, on entering the crowded room, that, from the number of charges claiming priority, he should be some time detained. It was no such pleasant sight to contemplate the number of wretches taken insensible from the door-steps of gin-shops; or, though it still wanted an hour of midnight, the set of miserable beings, more miserable from being less insensible, apprehended as wandering homeless in the streets at that inclement season. Basil Annesley was far from needing Shakspeare's admonishment—

> Take physic, Pomp,—
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,

in order to waken his sensibility to the wants of his fellow-creatures: still, till that night, he had been scarcely aware of the nature and amount of wretchedness infesting the streets of the Great Babylon.

At length his turn arrived; and he was beginning to launch forth into a simple narrative of what had befallen him, when he was authoritatively desired to hold his tongue; and the depositions of the police assumed their due precedence.

Let those who, after listening in either house to a dull debate, consisting of incoherent nothings, hemmed and hawed by one honourable member, mumbled by a second, mouthed by a third, and executed in dumb show by the hands and lips of a fourth, (inaudible in the gallery,) peruse with wondering eyes on the following morning in the flowing periods of "The Times," a concentration of the wisdom of Parliament, arranged under the several heads of "the Duke of ——;" "the Marquis of ——;" "the Honourable Member for Finsbury," or for no-matter what,—as a fair representation of the bald disjointed chat of the preceding night,—conjecture the amazement of Basil on hearing a most consistent and plausible narrative of his exploits as a burglar.—His face was recognised by several present as familiar at Marlborough-street; while one, better informed than the rest, facetiously reminded him of his two months at the mill!—

It was a relief rather than a vexation when an examination of his person was ordered, preparatory to his being locked up for the night; knowing that, instead of the skeleton keys and jemmy imputed to him, the property in his great coat pockets would confirm the identity he had asserted.

When, however, the initials on his handkerchief, and the name inscribed in a pocket-book containing his letters and memoranda, had sufficed, as he fondly imagined, to prove the supposed delinquent of Brixton Mill to be an officer of the Guards of honourable reputation, and he was anticipating apologies from the inspector, new grounds of suspicion presented themselves. The fellow who taxed his face with having been "up a matter o' twenty times at Mobbro-street," suggested that the "soortoo might have been prigged" from the rightful owner, and worn with all his property, in order to establish an alias.

"If you will send a messenger to the Guards' Club, and request Captain Blencowe, whose cab is waiting there, either to drive hither and identify me, or despatch one of my brother officers for that purpose, or even his own servant who accompanied me an hour ago to Delahay-street, you will perceive that these men have deposed falsely, or rather to thrice as much as the truth," said Basil, in a tone that startled the benumbed faculties of the stultified inspector; and after some further discussion among the deponents, he was locked up to abide the result of the message.

Three quarters of an hour, did poor Annesley await the return of the policeman despatched to St. James's-street; in a room reeking with the vapours of gin and tobacco, created by three ragged human beings huddled together, two upon a flock bed in a corner of the strong-room, the third upon the floor, and breathing so hard and irregularly, as to betoken an apopletic seizure rather than mere drunkenness. It was in vain he remonstrated against being placed in collision with these outcasts. The charge of false-witnessing he had made against the police force, exposed him to the utmost rigour of what is called the law.

At length, when heated and chafed almost to frenzy by this untimely incarceration and revolting companionship, the grating lock intimated that his probation was at an end; and he was summoned back into the police room, now hotter than ever, and crowded with new committals.

The first objects that struck him (their Chesterfield wrappers and laughing faces affording a singular contrast to the uniforms of the policemen and filthy tatters of the prisoners) were Maitland and Wilberton, arm-in-arm, who, having issued from the supper-table into the frosty air on Annesley's summons, were just sufficiently affected by the cigars and brandy-and-water they had taken at starting to enjoy beyond measure, the part they proposed to play. Though satisfied by Basil's message of the nature of his scrape, they pretended, on reaching the station-house, to believe themselves, summoned at the impudent instigation of an impostor, and the consequence was, that, on emerging from the lock-up room, the prisoner found himself treated quite as cavalierly as before.

"Never saw the fellow in my life," stammered Wilberton, who, more elated than his companion, was delighted at the prospect of the spree proposed by John Maitland, by way of retaliation on Basil's pretended engagement. "Some drunken dog of—of a pick-pocket—who has made fr—free with our names!"

"Dooced hard that a gentleman should be disturbed from his

supper on such absurd pretences," added Maitland, assuming an air of drunken indignation.

Annesley was now about to be removed to a cell for the remainder of the night, when something in the rollicking air, and exulting tone of the two witnesses, so far attracted the notice of the experienced inspector, that when Basil, appealing to him in the gentlemanly tone which rarely fails of effect, entreated that the servant or servants who had driven down with the two gentlemen to the station, might be called in, he readily complied. But before Maitland's tiger had time to make his appearance, whose testimony must put an end to the mystery, his master had begun to address Annesley by the nameof "old fellow!" and to treat the matter as a joke.

The result was the instant release of the supposed burglar. Nothing had been found upon him confirmatory of the depositions of B 947, who had already sneaked off in anticipation of being given in charge in his turn; and, by way of conciliating the ex-prisoner, who, ere he followed his jocose friends out of the station house, intimated his intention of lodging a complaint with the magistrates on the morrow, the inspector acquainted him that unable to obtain ingress to the house in Delahay-street, and seriously alarmed for the safety of its inmate, the policemen had attempted to force the door, the noise of which brought down the old man from his attic, pistols in hand, to certify his own safety.

"Nevertheless," added the inspector, "the constable, who persuaded him to a parley with the chain up, states that the old gentleman was in such a state of debility that his voice was scarcely audible; which account, sir, ought certainly to have induced more belief than I accorded to the motive you adduced for visiting him at so strange an hour."

On his release from the tyranny of the police, Basil determined to return instantly to Delahay Street; being now certain that the little sweeper had proved false to his charge, and that the miserable old man was left alone.

Just as he was quitting the door of the station-house, resisting the officious offers of a raggamuffin loitering near the door to run and fetch him a cab, a strange figure appeared at the corner of the street, which, but for its venturing so near the head-quarters of the law, might easily have been mistaken for one of the calling to which Basil had just escaped the imputation of belonging. But the moon shone too brightly through the clear atmosphere, to admit of any deception in the eyes of Annesley, who instantly discerned in that unsightly form the individual to whose aid he was hastening, as perhaps on a bed of death.

"What, in God's name, sir, has tempted you out in your present state on such a night?" cried Basil, eagerly accosting him.

But the answer was wholly unintelligible. Abednego leaned heavily against the area-railings of an adjoining house, as if overcome by his feelings or his infirmities, and groaned aloud.

"Fetch a coach!" cried Basil, to the fellow who had been importuning him; perceiving that, short as was the distance to Delahay Street, there was much doubt whether the strength of the sick man would enable him to retrace his steps, and while listening to the

broken gasps, half invective, half endearment, in which Abednego attempted to express anger at his young friend's officiousness, and indignation at the dilemma into which it had betrayed him, a vehicle rattled up. The manner in which the invalid, after being lifted in, sunk breathless into a corner, convinced Basil Annesley that his previous anxieties were not exaggerated.

"It is as much as his life is worth to have encountered the night-air on such a night!" burst involuntarily from his lips, as he compared the warm interest entertained in his behalf by the eccentric old Jew, with the desertion of his gay associates; and a hoarse ejaculation of "MY life!" which escaped the lips of his companion, was the only intelligible sound that reached the ear of Basil till they stopped before the door in Delahay Street.

"You must allow me to assist you up stairs," said Basil, as the coachman held open the coach door, and Abednego, taking a pass-key from his waistcoat pocket, prepared to open his own.

"No, no!" muttered the old man,—"I tell you, no! *Who* is to put the chain up after you, when you quit the house?"

But the effort he had made for this explanation proved too much for him; and on reaching his door, he tottered and would have fallen, while attempting to place the key in the lock, had not Annesley started forward and supported him in his arms. A low moaning now escaped his lips; and Annesley having taken the key from his icy hand, and pushed open with his foot the slowly yielding door, carried him into the hall, and placed him on a bench. After returning to pay and dismiss the coachman, he carefully closed the street door; and even so far conceded to the habits of Abednego as to bar it and put up the chain, ere he snatched with one hand the filthy iron lamp which the Jew had left burning on the pavement of the hall on his departure for the station-house, and offered his arm to A. O., who was gradually reviving.

"Let me see you up stairs, sir," said Basil. "It is useless declining my assistance. The night is half over; and since I know you to be alone in the house, I *swear* that I will not quit it before morning."

The suffering man seemed fully aware of his incompetency under the influence of growing indisposition to dispute the point; for, instead of offering further resistance, he accepted the proffered arm of Basil, and attempted to ascend the stairs.

The task, however, was by no means easy. His respiration was impeded by the increased swelling and inflammation of his throat; and on attaining the second landing, he clung with both hands to the arm of Annesley, and panted for breath.

It was not till after the lapse of some minutes, they were able to attain the attic; the door of which was locked, from habit more than as a security, since there was no other human being in the house.

They entered the room. Basil saw with concern that there was not a vestige of fire; and that his suffering companion had risen from his miserable bed to answer the summons of the police. From the iron lamp he carried, young Annesley hastily lighted a candle at stood on the table, which, in strange contradiction to the habits bednego, proved to be of wax.

"Give me the lamp," faltered the old man, rising from the *bergère* into which he had sunk exhausted on entering.—"I have wood and shavings in the other room. Since you choose to abide with me, I suppose I must kindle a fire."

"Not on *my* account, sir," said Basil, eagerly, but on reflecting that the sentiment of hospitality might be the only means of inducing the old gentleman to bestow upon himself a necessary indulgence, he desisted; and Abednego tottered, grumbling, into the adjoining chamber.

Thus left alone, on casting his eyes around him upon that wretched room, as much a place of penance as the police cell he had quitted, Basil noticed that, on a low table beside the flock bed, lay the book borrowed that morning by his host; and beside it, a large crucifix of Berlin iron, and a folded paper. A CRUCIFIX!—The world then, and his own suspicions, had decided wrongfully. Abednego the Money-lender was only in name and practices a Jew.

While pondering upon this startling discovery, a heavy fall in the adjoining closet attracted Basil's attention; and though believing it to proceed only from a log of the wood mentioned by his singular host, he hurried to his assistance. Either A. O. had entangled his feet in the long wrapper in which he had enveloped himself to confront the night air, or had fallen from weakness; for there he lay, stretched upon the heap of mingled coals, cinders, and fragments of old wood, that encumbered one corner of the room.

The old man had struck himself too in the fall; for on lifting him up, Basil perceived, by the light of the lamp, (which, though overturned on the floor, was not extinguished,) that blood was gushing from his lips. Lifting him in his arms, he bore him like a child into the adjoining attic, and placed him on the bed; Abednego groaning heavily at intervals, either from illness, or the disastrous effects of his accident.

His host thus manifestly disabled, Basil felt entitled to bestir himself according to his own inventions. He was there alone, in the dead of night, without aid or comfort, in sole charge of a sick or dying man. It was no moment for scruples or nicety. Throwing off his great coat, and hastily gathering, from the heap in the adjoining room, materials for a fire, he soon produced a blaze in the rusty old grate, which diffused some degree of cheerfulness and promised gradually to diffuse warmth, through the desolate apartment.

An old kettle stood within the fender; but as it proved empty, Basil proceeded to a stone water-jug that stood in a corner of the room, to replenish it. Alas! the water in the pitcher was frozen. In order to break the ice, which resisted his hand, Basil took up a faggot-stick lying near it on the floor. The crash caused by the fracture seemed to rouse the faculties of Abednego, who instantly woke as from a stupor.

"What mischief are you doing there?" gasped he, evidently only partially sensible. "What have you broken? I have not kept a piece of crockery entire since you began to wait upon me. And how dare you light that monstrous fire?—Fool!—what have I to roast here besides your own wretched limbs, that you thus waste my fuel?"

From the little Basil Annesley could gather of this apostrophe, uttered in a hoarse whisper, he saw that Abednego's head was wandering, and that he mistook him for the little sweeper.

Without attempting to undeceive him, he persisted in his self-imposed task; filled the kettle, set it on the fire, and having found untouched the packet of dried lime-flowers he had despatched from the chemist's for an infusion, prepared a drink for the sick man, such as he remembered to have been administered to himself at Heidelberg, by the mother of Esther.

There was some difficulty in finding a cup in which to offer it to Abednego. As a last resource, Basil took from a shelf behind him what appeared to be a bronze ornament, which afterwards proved to be an antique silver goblet, a *chef-d'œuvre* of one of the old chasers of Lombardy.

The invalid drank and was comforted. His moans became less heavy. After a time, he opened his eyes, and breathed as though the oppression of his chest were in some degree relieved. By degrees, and before he altogether regained his consciousness, Basil removed his outer garments, and having placed them under his pillow as a prop to his head, covered him closely up with the quilt of his wretched pallet.

With a second cup of the hot infusion, he now mixed some antimony as prescribed by the chemist he had consulted; and the invalid having again, almost mechanically, swallowed the soothing infusion, Basil left it to exercise its effect; and, wearied by his unaccustomed exertions, flung himself into the old *bergère* before the fireplace, for rest and reflection.

The strangeness of his own situation afforded, of course, the first subject of his cogitations. There was *he*, who had indignantly rebutted as an imputation, the charge of intimacy with A. O. brought against him at Lady Maitland's by Blencowe and his set, actually established as sick-nurse beside his bed in a filthy garret: performing for him menial offices which he would have hesitated to execute for persons having claims upon his kindness.

Only a few nights before, his mother had refused to accept offices far less humiliating from him, in behalf of an old and faithful servant; and now, he was attending, sole servitor, the dying bed of a stranger, whose very existence, a little month before, had been utterly unknown to him.

But the strangest of all these incongruities was, that, for the life and soul of him, he could not bring himself to regard Abednego Osalez as a stranger. Some mysterious tie appeared to unite them. Though the common but most holy tie of fellow-creatureship, including even the Money-lender, under the Biblical designation of "neighbour," ought to have sufficed as a motive for the exertions of the young Samaritan, Basil Annesley, as he contemplated the smoky fireplace, did not conceal from himself that he felt as if seated beside the hearth of one with whom he had been long accustomed to break bread, and take counsel.

And yet, the man who lay breathing heavy and unconscious on that wretched pallet, was one whose vocation and habits were hateful to the generous mind of the young soldier Though the

vigorous language and force of intellect of Abednego had invested the calling of the Money-lender with a new character in the eyes of Basil, though the keenness of his soul and greatness of his speculations had interposed a sort of veil over the littleness of his daily doings, and the detestable nature of his usury, young Annesley did not disguise from himself that the man who contemplated with such far-sighted philosophy the value and social influence of money, was in practice a pettifogging miser.

Still, with all the inconsistency and odiousness of his pursuits, Basil was conscious of involuntary deference towards the proprietor of that filthy garret.

The power of thought,—the magic of the mind,—

the energy of soul—of one so immeasurably superior to his position—and so strangely master of the destinies of others, threw a halo round the gloom of the place. It was such wilful, wayward, self-denying misery, there was such a force of will, such a concentration of self-infliction in the privations of the starving *millionaire*, that he felt as if contemplating De Rancé in the cells of La Trappe, or Charles V. in those of St. Quintin, rather than a vulgar miser undergoing his wilful Prometheanism! While gazing on those denuded walls, if it were possible to abhor, it was not easy to despise the prisoner in that iron chest of unavailing treasure.

His greatest source of annoyance, now that he was satisfied of having afforded the best succour in his power to the physical ailments of the sick man, arose from the certainty of having exposed himself to the raillery of his brother officers. Devoid as they were of entertainment at that season of the year, they would not fail to discuss among themselves his solitary visit to the theatre, after the pretext of an engagement; his having driven in Blencowe's cab to what would otherwise have passed for some rendezvous, but what was now discovered to be a midnight visit to A. O.; a visit, moreover, so unauthorized, as to have caused him to be taken up as a burglar, and exposed him to the chance of a night in the station-house.

It was not to be expected that such men as Wilberton and Maitland would deal leniently with these discoveries; and old Carrington was now too stale as a butt, not to impart due value to an adventure which exposed young Annesley for ever and a day to the bantering of those who had already moved his choler by qualifying him as the arm-in-arm companion of the Money-lender.

To escape the annoyance of his anticipations on this provoking subject Basil proceeded to take from the table, the only book that naked room afforded for his amusement; the volume of Hollar which Abednego had so strangely chosen as the consolation of his hours of sickness.

As he removed it stealthily from the table, in order not to awaken the sick man from his unquiet slumbers, he inadvertently brushed down the paper lying beside it, and stooped to restore it to the table. In the displacement something fell out. On searching upon the floor, it proved to be a lock of hair; a long, long tress, coil within coil, which it was impossible not to recognise as that of a

woman, and difficult not to surmise as that of a woman young and lovely;—so silken was its texture,—so rich its hue.

Without the smallest intention of prying into the household secrets of his host, Basil could not replace it in the paper without discerning this. He even noticed the peculiar colour of the hair. It was a rare tint: long familiar to his eyes as that of a tress, all but similar, which he carried in his pocket-book, and which had been recently unfolded before him during the insolent examination at the police-office: his mother's hair,—not silvered as now by the hand of time and influence of care;—but rich and glossy as during her sunny youth. Basil regarded this lock, which he had obtained as a gift from Dorcas without Lady Annesley's knowledge, as the most precious treasure in his possession.

Irresistibly impelled to compare it with the tress he had discovered in the possession of the Money-lender, he drew forth his pocket-book, abstracted it from the paper, and placed them side by side. Not the variation of a hair in the length—not the difference of a shade in their hue.—They were one and the same.—The most indifferent observer would have decided, as Basil was for a moment inclined to decide, that they had been shred from the same beloved head.

But could this be? What analogy—what connexion could exist, or could ever have existed between the Money-lender of Greek-street, Soho, and the widow of Sir Bernard Annesley;—the haughty daughter of the proudest of ambassadors,—Lord L——— and the thrifty artful usurer;—the degraded—the notorious—the infamous A. O.

CHAPTER XII.

Tell me tales of thy first love,
April hopes—the fools of chance—
Till the graves begin to move,
Till the dead begin to dance.—TENNYSON.

SCARCELY less sad than the scene in which young Annesley was officiating, was the one in which, at the same moment, his mother was acting a part equally humane, in her dreary abode at Barlingham Grange.

The old gardener was no more. The burst of feeling of which Basil had been a spectator, proved to be the last effort of expiring nature; and it was the lady to whom from her childhood he had been devoted, who closed the glassy eyes of the old man, and placed watchlights beside the dead.

Lady Annesley was, perhaps, the inmate of the Grange best qualified for that solemn duty. Her mind, rendered stern by habitual contact with care, was now of a consistency to encounter without trembling all or any of those earnest duties of life, from which the gentle hearts and hands of her sex recoil with terror.

Like one moving in her sleep, she had breathed in the ears of old

Nicholas the prayers appointed by the Church for a dying bed; and if this effort were perhaps instigated by reluctance to expose the revelations of his infirm intellect to the ears of a stranger, it was no such apprehension that induced her to assist the sobbing Dorcas in straightening his limbs for the grave, ere consigned by the proper attendants to his last home. Once placed in his coffin, she quitted the room; quitted it with a heavy sigh—an in-breathed prayer. Early sorrows had been bitterly renewed by her trying attendance on the old man, who had unconsciously wounded her to the quick by his incoherent ravings;—and above all, by the hazard to which they had exposed her of betrayal to the child of her heart. But he was now at rest. Both had done their duty. The grey-headed man was released from his earthly penance; it was she alone who remained to suffer and to atone.

Every person whose feelings have been excited by the performance of some severe and engrossing duty, must have been conscious of a strange vacuity of feeling when the influence of that painful tension is at an end. Like a sufferer whose infirm or shattered limb has been removed by the surgeon, undefinable sensations of uneasiness seem to possess its vacant place. So harassed had been Lady Annesley during the continuance of the gardener's illness, and the perpetual hazards to which it exposed her, that, on the afternoon of the day in which he was laid in the grave, when the old house was restored to its usual mournful quietude, and the two women in their mourning suits kept moving silently and sadly about her, she could not settle to her customary occupations.

Involuntarily, she re-entered the room which had been appropriated to the use of the deceased; the threshold of which she had never crossed of late, save under the influence of awe and remorse. All was restored to its usual form. The winter sun was shining through the open casement; and driven back by the piercing atmosphere thus admitted, she had no resource but her own warm sitting-room, and the solace of her books and desk.

Nothing more common than for people of the world, on hearing some compulsory recluse complain of the cheerlessness of solitude, to exclaim, "But why not read to amuse yourself?" But the notion of reading for amusement entertained by such people, consists in a first-class subscription to a fashionable library, insuring the earliest perusal of popular works,—new novels, brilliant periodicals,—holding up to the eye, as in a mirror, a reflection of the progress of civilization, and a picture of the manners and prosperities of the day.

Lady Annesley's book-case, on the contrary, contained only old editions of the works of past centuries;—philosophy rendered obsolete by modern improvement;—and theology purporting to split so fine the straws of doctrinal casuistry, as to reduce them to chaff. The few sterling books she possessed, the bosom comforters to which we turn in sickness and sorrow, had been her sole companions for twenty lonely years; and with all one's partiality for a favourite writer, it is not more impossible for the dried leaves of the rose to retain the hue and fragrance of the living flower, than for the hundredth perusal to yield the charm of the first. It may,

indeed, perhaps, when voluntarily culled from the shelves of a voluminous library. But it is only the uninformed and unimaginative mind of the peasant that can derive amusement, Sunday after Sunday, throughout a long life, from his solitary volume of the Pilgrim's Progress.

Lady Annesley had been more than once forced to admit to herself, that her little library had ceased to charm; and if she pined after anything in her seclusion, it was for the charm of new books to create a new order of ideas, or a happier combination of the old. But on that cheerless afternoon, she felt as if those ancient companions of her sorrow might perhaps renew their charm; and in accordance with the promptings of the solemn scene of the morning, in the little village church wherein she had seen ashes reconsigned to ashes, and dust to dust, she proceeded to her bookshelf to take down her favourite Holbein, with its well-remembered philosophical interleavings. It was gone!—The book was included in a set of six volumes of favourite works:—the Essays of Montaigne, and George Herbert's Manual—all in the same antique binding. Of these, five alone remained. The copy of Hollar was no longer there!

Lady Annesley felt surprised and angry. So undisturbed was the tenour of her life, that no person but herself and her two waiting-women ever crossed the threshold of that chamber; of whom, Hannah could not read or write, while Dorcas was one of those fortunate individuals who find better companionship in the seam they are sewing than in the choicest *chef d'œuvre* of human intellect.

Still, either the one or the other might have been tempted by the striking designs of the work, to remove it from the room for more leisurely inspection. She rang and inquired. Neither of them had ever noticed either the existence or disappearance of the book. She now demanded whether, during her attendance on the gardener, any stranger had been admitted into the room.

"No person whatever," was the reply.

"Most strange and most vexatious!" was her rejoinder; adding, in the depths of her heart, "So few are the relics I retain of those days,—so few and so precious,—that ill could I afford to part with *this!*"

"It was, perhaps, Master Basil who borrowed the book?" suggested Dorcas, struck with a brilliant idea. "The morning he was forced to remain here, after your ladyship's fainting fit, he was hours moping alone here, in the morning-room. Perhaps he had begun to read it and took it with him to finish on the road."

Lady Annesley expressed a contrary conviction, and dismissed her attendant. Yet so probable was the surmise, that the moment she was alone, she seized a pen to address an inquiry on the subject to her son. She had intended deferring till the morrow intelligence of the decease of poor old Nicholas. But in the eagerness of her desire to assure herself of the fate of her book, she lost not a moment.

Nothing could be more embarrassing than to address Basil on the subject of their old servant's demise. For she had ventured no explanation with her son after the terrible scene in which they

had borne a part; and was consequently uncertain whether suspicions had been excited on the part of Basil, or whether he attributed the terrible revelations of the gardener solely to aberration of intellect.

The moment, however, that her mind became possessed by anxiety concerning her beloved volume, she lost sight of these considerations; and after narrating to him the death and burial of one who, she said, "had been to her as a friend when her own kith and kin had deserted her—a good, faithful, and submissive servant, in days of adversity as in days more prosperous,"—she proceeded to inquire whether he could give her any tidings of the missing book.

"You are my only son, Basil," wrote Lady Annesley. "Nay, the estrangement and prosperity of your sister render you my only heir. Yet a few years, and the little I possess will be your own. Even now, I am not, I trust, sparing in administering to your comfort, or prodigal in the indulgence of my own. I cannot therefore think, Basil, that you have surreptitiously abstracted from my house an object which I prize. How *much* I prize it, you are not able to conjecture. I shall go down to my grave, and neither you nor others will ever learn how dear, yet how cruel, are the recollections with which that relic is connected. In my solitude here, I live but in the past. *That* which is gone—*those* who are gone, encompass me with an atmosphere holy and precious as themselves. The Hope that abideth in *you*, the Memory that abideth in *them*, hath a joy which is not of this world. I know not what I write. The loss of this book has disordered me.—It seems as if one of the unrestorable treasures of past affection were wrested from me for ever.

"No delay, Basil, I entreat! Write to me, if you have any communication to make touching the object in question. Fear no reproaches on my part, if it should prove that your hand indeed removed it from my house. Too happy shall I be to welcome it back again to hazard a single accusing word."

Such was the letter despatched from Barlingham Grange. Such the letter which Basil Annesley drew from his pocket beside a decent camp-bed established in the attic of A. O., on the fifth morning after the critical night of his disorder.

So imminent had appeared the danger of the Money-lender on the morrow of his vigils, that young Annesley, doubly alarmed by the responsibility devolving on himself should the death of a man so richly endowed occur under his solitary guardianship and circumstances so suspicious, had despatched the sweeper for the aid of his regimental surgeon, through whose means he subsequently procured a proper attendant, and a few of the necessaries of life.

Abednego was now too heavily oppressed by disease to take heed of the arrival of strangers or bedding in his attic; and all that Basil could do in excuse for their introduction into the treasury of treasuries, (should the old man survive to question his proceedings,) was to seal up the doors of the different rooms and the invaluable bureau, and give up a daily portion of his time to the superintendence of the establishment.

Abednego was, however, more cognizant than he surmised of

what was passing around him. He was aware of his danger; aware of the urgent necessity for the precautions taken; and the nurse proving a decent, dull woman, content to sit quiet in view whenever not employed in serving him, he was better satisfied she should be there, than that the house should be surrendered to the discrétion of Bill the sweeper.

Still, Basil had little idea how often, during his absence, the sufferer raised his head from his pillow to inquire of the woman in attendance the hour of the day, the length of time that had elapsed since the young man's departure, and what promise he had given of return. He had little idea how completely he imparted light and life to that sinking frame. He could imagine, of course, that his disinterested services were acceptable to the infirm Money-lender. He knew that Abednego must be aware how solicitude in his behalf had exposed him to one of the most disagreeable dilemmas it had ever been his luck to encounter; and though such was the state of weakness consequent on the yielding of the quinsy that they had held no conversation on the subject; young Annesley naturally conceived the sufferer to be gratefully and kindly disposed. Enough for him, however, that so whimsical a being had not seen fit to resent his interference; and he looked forward to the convalescence of the invalid rather as a relief to himself from a painful and responsible attendance, than from any desire to receive his thanks.

The receipt of Lady Annesley's letter startled him into other feelings. It was urgent that he should regain possession of the book, and lose no time in restoring it to his mother. But how was this to be accomplished? It had disappeared from the table, as well as the crucifix and paper containing the lock of hair; and the nurse, who seldom or never quitted the room, declared that she knew nothing of it. That the invalid, still scarcely able to lift his head from his pillow, should have removed it, appeared improbable; and Abednego was so weak, and, above all, so peevish, that Basil had scarcely courage to molest him with inquiries.

"If he only surmised," thought young Annesley, as he sat contemplating the embarrassments of the case, "how mysterious a resemblance exists between her hair for whose pleasure I require the book, and the lock he seems to treasure with such wild devotion, he would forgive my importunity."

On entering the room on the morning he received the letter, Basil accosted the invalid with his usual inquiries concerning his night's rest and the visit of the surgeon.

"Your doctor is to come no more," said Abednego, faintly. "I paid and dismissed him last night. It was only to satisfy *you* I bore with him, as I now bear with the old woman dozing yonder in my easy-chair. But for her being here, how do I know that you would not come tormenting me again at midnight, to light my fire and snuff my candle?"

"By all this, sir, I perceive that you feel much better. It is only the man in health who quarrels with his physician. As to the nurse, you will admit her to be a safer guardian for you than a beggar from the street," added Basil, in a lower voice.

"That is as it may prove," retorted Abednego, gruffly. "In the time of the plague, Defoe informs us, nurses used to twist the wind-pipes of their patients. Thank Heaven, I am now strong enough to take care of my own; so till I can make my fire, and boil my kettle, she is welcome to remain. She 'finds *herself*,' as such people call it, and gives me less trouble than I give her. Nor is there much here," he continued, glancing round the naked walls, "to attract pilfering fingers."

"There *were* things here," Basil began,—perceiving that the nurse was really asleep, under the influence of a crackling fire on a frosty day,—"there were objects here, at the commencement of your illness, which I see no longer; and the disappearance of which makes me uneasy."

"How mean you?" cried Abednego, raising himself on his elbow, and pushing aside the curtains to peer out upon the bureau which contained property to the amount of thousands upon thousands.

"No need to look so far, or so anxiously," observed Basil. "The things I speak of are of no such urgent value, save, perhaps, to you and myself,—an iron crucifix—a time-worn book—"

"And what do you suppose to have become of them, pray?" cried Abednego, sharply, letting fall the curtain, and sinking back again on his pillow.

"I was in hopes, Sir, *you* might be able to inform me."

"And if I were, are you so miserly with your property, that you cannot trust me with an old book?"

"I would trust you with any property belonging to myself; the care you take of your own satisfies me that mine would run no danger of being mislaid while in your keeping. Unluckily, I have little either to lend or to give; so that you are unlikely to be much the better for my confidence."

"But when I tell you that, valueless as it may seem to *you*, I hold to that book—"

"I should still be under the necessity of—"

"When I tell you," persisted Abednego, not heeding his interruption, "that it is my comfort by day and by night, that in the anguish of my disease it lay upon my bosom, and soothed its throbbings, that, in the darkness of my despair, it shed light and peace around me, as from the wings of an angel."

Basil began to entertain an opinion that the senses of the invalid were again wandering.

"When I swear to you, that while treasured here, here, beneath my pillow, here, side by side with the emblem of eternal redemption, (dear to me as to yourself, although the lying world opprobriate me by the name of Jew), it has yielded me more comfort than the Cross of Faith, with all its promises of Heaven, do you *still* desire to take it from me?—No, no, Basil! leave it,—unless you wish to see me sink again into the bruised and breathless mummy to which I was reduced when you snatched me from the grave."

Basil Annesley was silent. To dispute with him on a point that seemed so trifling, at a moment thus critical, seemed an act of cruelty; yet to disappoint the anxious expectations of Lady Annesley was a deed yet more unpardonable.

"I told you, sir," said he, in a hesitating tone, and after a long pause, "that the book was not my own, and that I had abstracted it from home without the concurrence of my mother."

"Well?" demanded Abednego, again drawing aside the curtains, and fixing his piercing eyes upon those of his visitor.

"She has demanded it back again. She is greatly displeased at my having removed it from Barlingham."

"Send her down the last new novel from Hookham's!" muttered A. O., with bitter scorn; "the lady will doubtless consider it a profitable exchange."

"You are too presumptuous, sir, in deciding upon the tastes and feelings of a stranger," retorted Basil, with spirit. "You little know the woman you pretend to judge. Never in my days did I see a novel in the hands of my mother. Her studies are severe as her conduct is exemplary."

"A saint, eh? Then send her a bale of sermons from Hatchard's! What matter under what form the weak nature of woman accepts its subjugating influence? Novels, poems, tracts—"

"In one word," said Basil, drawing Lady Annesley's letter from his pocket, "read, and judge for yourself, whether a woman, so exalted in heart and mind as the writer of this, is likely to accept ANY exchange for the book she prizes."

On seeing his mother's sacred handwriting pass into the withered hands of Abednego, Basil almost repented the concession he had made. It was degrading a letter of hers to expose it to the eyes of a Money-lender. The deed, however, was done.

In order to give time to A. O., in his weak condition, for the perusal of the letter, Basil Annesley walked gently to the window, so as not to rouse the nurse from her doze. There was nothing very interesting in the look-out. A mass of icicles, appended to the leaden water-pipe of the opposite attic, was the most interesting object he found to contemplate.

At the close of a few minutes, he returned to the bedside, intending to resume his conversation with Abednego. But all was still as the grave. No movement—not a sound. The old man uttered not a word, and made no attempt to give back the letter. At last, in a gentle voice of expostulation, Basil addressed him, and addressed him in vain.

Young Annesley now drew aside the curtains of the bed; and found that no vestige of its inmate was perceptible. Abednego had gathered up the bed-clothes over his head. Like some mourner of scriptural times, he had covered his face with his garment, and wept bitterly.

Agitated, in his turn, by this unaccountable emotion, Basil Annesley was beginning to feel intolerably bewildered by the baffling mysteries that seemed to involve the fatal volume, his removal of which from Barlingham had been the cause of such general disturbance.

"For the love of Heaven, sir," cried he, "explain all this. Explain the interest which you and every one else appear to attach to that accursed book, a source of distress to all with whom I am concerned."

Still, Abednego answered not a syllable. By the movements of the clothes in which he had enveloped himself, Basil could alone infer the struggles of his emotion.

"I beseech you, sir," cried the young man, after a second pause, "if you entertain the least kindness for me—if you feel towards me a thousandth part of the goodwill which has prompted my own exertions in your behalf, tell me the meaning of your tears. They had not been wrung out of such a soul as yours, save by some all-powerful interest. You are not woman-hearted, to weep for wantonness, or from the weakness of mere exhaustion. Tell me—"

"I can tell you nothing," murmured Abednego, uncovering his face, and showing the letter of Lady Annesley crushed in his hand by the grasp of uncontrollable passion, "save that this letter has roused emotions dormant for years. I had not thought, I had not dreamed, that this woman had retired from the world to ponder over feelings such as these," and again, with trembling hand, he grasped the letter. "I believed her, cold and callous as she was once worldly. I believed—but no matter. These few words have wrung a dew out of the stony depths of my heart, of which I believed the fountains to be dried up. Thanks, Basil Annesley—this is not the first benefit you have bestowed upon me.—Thanks.—Here—take your book," he continued, drawing the volume from beneath his pillow. "But, unless you would convulse her heart with agony, as you have unwittingly convulsed mine, tell her not, on your life, through what strange hands it has experienced a momentary transit. Unless you wish to be expulsed for ever from your mother's house, unless you wish to incur her malediction, never, *never*, while you live, breathe in the ear of that unhappy woman the reprobated name of Abednego Osalez."

Ere the sufferer ceased to speak, his voice was lost in broken sobs; and so terrible and absorbing was his emotion, that Basil had not courage to pursue the anxious inquiries suggesting themselves to his mind. He was overpowered by the spectacle of so profoundly-felt a grief.

In order to relieve the feelings of the old man from observation, he again rose and walked to the window; endeavouring to straighten and restore to his pocket-book the crumpled letter replaced in his hands by Abednego.

By the time he finished his task and returned to the bedside, the old man had completely recovered his self-possession, and was lying with his face exposed in all its usual harsh composedness of feature.

"You are the comptroller of my household, now," said he, addressing Basil with a grim attempt at a smile. "Tell me, does the poor boy still officiate as my lackey?"

"Bill is installed down stairs, sir, to answer the inquiries of your numerous visitors," replied Basil, somewhat startled by his change of tone.

"I wonder, while you were about it, you had not the street laid with straw, and the knocker tied up, as for some dainty goosecap's lying-in!" muttered Abednego, forcing a laugh.

"Perhaps I might have done so, sir, but from the fear of offendin

you," replied Basil, attempting to smile in his turn. "Methinks I have taken liberties enough in your establishment."

"My illness must have caused no little commotion among my customers," resumed Abednego, evidently intent upon distracting Basil's recollections from his recent struggle of feeling. "There are more people interested in the life and death of A. O. than in the fairest of the childbed puppets in fine linen, we were talking of. Sore are their misgivings, poor prodigal souls, concerning the hands into which, on my decease, their bonds and securities might fall. To *them* it is a matter of fame and name that the heir of the old Jew should prove a man as trustworthy as himself."

"There has been some anxiety testified, sir, I must admit, if *that* be any consolation to you," replied young Annesley. "Every day, from twelve to two, the door is besieged, I am told, with applicants, concerning not alone your house in Greek-street, but dozens of other houses. But as I am by no means qualified to act as your clerk or deputy, you must consult Bill on your recovery. Having little appetite for business, I have left all such matters in his hands."

"But my *letters?*" inquired A. O., feeling, or affecting anxiety.

"As soon as you are better, the boy shall bring them up to you."

"I *am* better, I *am* better.—I am quite well already," cried his companion, settling himself in bed. "I am always well enough for business."

Having roused the nurse by a touch on the shoulder, Basil despatched her down stairs in search of the letters and papers left for A. O.; of which, on her return, she brought an apron full.

"I find that you have had certain fair inquirers," observed Basil, while the woman was away, "fully confirming your former attestation to me of the advantages of a Money-lender's calling. You have had those pressing and suing to be admitted to see *you*, to be admitted to see whom, others are eager suitors. You have had the Duke of Rochester here twice a-day, evidently believing your illness to be a subterfuge; and in the other room, there is a whole bale of necessaries,—sugar, arrow-root, wax-candles,—despatched to you, *not* by a grocer's wife, (as the nature of the gift seems to indicate,) but by no less a person than the lovely Countess of Winterfield."

Abednego replied by a hoarse chuckle.

"I should starve but for that woman; and her family might starve but for *me!*" cried he, turning exultingly on his pillow. "She is the purveyor of my larder, the clerk of my kitchen. Well, well! I am at least as grateful for her sago, tapioca, and Welsh flannel, (of which you might have found wholesale pieces had you looked in the lumber-room below, when you and the nurse were smothering me up the other night,) as *she* to the memory of the husband who made her what she is, and whose portrait I have in pawn yonder in my bureau."

The nurse now re-entered the room with her burden; and having deposited the papers on a chair beside the bed, Basil dismissed her, in order that Abednego might examine them undisturbed by her presence.

"Show me the minister who has a more voluminous corre-

spondence on his hands than this," cried the old man, pointing exultingly to the pile of papers. "And pray, who paid the postage of these letters?"

"*I* did, sir; that is, I supplied the money to your servant."

"So, so! You institute yourself my banker, then, as well as my *maître d'hotel* and groom of the chambers? With all my heart. I am always ready to accept services and comforts I have not to pay for, witness the tea and sugar of my Lady Winterfield. Look here!" he continued, pointing out, among the letters he was successively opening, several with seals that bore aristocratic emblazonments. "Dukes, marquises, earls, I have them all —*all* in my train. I walk like a king at his coronation, with Howards, Percys, Plantagenets, in the wake of the contemned and trampled A. O. Thriftless fools! some flattering, some cajoling, some threatening. As if a single word they could write or utter would influence me more than the winter's wind whistling through the crannies of my casement; unless, indeed, the Open-Sesame called *interest*. At twenty per cent., fifty per cent., a hundred per cent., I am willing to hear of their wants and distresses. But what care I for the executions in their houses, or the seizure of their family plate, or their wife's jewels. Here's a fellow writes to me," pursued Abednego, striking the open letter with his hand, "begging me to save the honour of his family-mansion from the desecration of sheriffs' officers, and swearing he will not survive such a disgrace. Was it *I* who brought the disgrace upon him? Was it *I* who decoyed him to Crockford's? Was it *I* who induced him to hazard thousands, night after night, at piquet, when he had not even hundreds at his disposal? *Don't* let him survive his disgrace! Not the disgrace of bailiffs, but that of insolvency, brought upon himself by prodigality and vice. When he first applied to me for assistance, he informed me, in answer to my remonstrances, (much in the terms once used by a certain Mr. Basil Annesley,) that he came for money, not advice; that he wanted a Jew, not a family chaplain."

Basil was vexed to find himself colouring deeply at this allusion.

"And here," continued A. O., bringing forward a perfumed billet from among the wafered communications of attorneys and stockbrokers, ill-favoured epistles from Birchin-lane, Bartlett's-buildings, and Hart-street, Bloomsbury, "*here* is a dainty creature who wants me to oblige her with the loan of her own emeralds to appear at Windsor Castle. The guest of royalty, forsooth, writing in terms more abject than I ever heard used by Bill the sweeper, to an old Money-lender. *More* delicate handwritings. 'Lucy Maitland?' Ay, ay! the old-china fancier. And here, Basil—here, Mr. Annesley, is the first application of one of your brother officers. My eye has been upon that boy these two months. I knew I should have him in my books—that is, *trying* to get into my books;—for I have enough of the family affairs on my hands with those of his precious uncle."

"*Wilberton*?—is he in difficulties?" exclaimed Annesley, in a tone of regret.

"Why not? He keeps the finest company, and has a taste for

opera-dancers, (as costly an item for a boy in the guards as Sèvres and Dresden to his mother.) You needn't blush again; I did not say opera *singers*, Mr. Annesley. Trust to my delicacy to make no allusion in *your* presence to any such fragile commodities."

"I *do* trust to your delicacy never again to allude, with light mention, to the person at whom, though under so false a designation, you are aiming," cried Basil, with warm indignation.

"Well, well,—no offence, no offence. Esther Verelst is, I dare say, no more fragile than her neighbours; though *that* implies no great things in the way of discretion.—'H. R.'—So then, my Pericles of the day; the five thousand for which you pledged your public honour, and the title-deeds of an estate in your family since they wheedled it out of the scurvy soul of James I., has not sufficed you? You must cut a figure as a giver of banquets, must you, as well as on the Treasury Bench? What is the joy of place, I marvel, unless its salary suffice to grease the wheels of office? 'The expenses of his very ostensible situation to be maintained,' he writes. Jackass!—Because he chooses to have Rhenish wines and French *entrées* at his dinner, and to be a fop and fribble as well as the first orator of the day, must he make false pretences to the Jews about 'the expenses of his ostensible situation?' Excellent H. R.! Though you date from Downing-street, you will not throw dust in the eyes of A. O. Were you half the clever fellow the world believes you, your letter would contain three lines—'I want two thousand pounds,—can give landed security, and not more than twelve per cent.' *That* is coming to the point;—between knowing one and knowing one, the best statesmanship. I should have thought the experience of office might have taught him the futility of fine phrases,—mere loss of time to writer and reader.—It is not by locking up brickbats in a plate-chest, Mr. Basil Annesley, that you can convert them into family plate."

"I am afraid you will tire yourself, sir," said Basil. "I would fain see you take some nourishment before I go. Let me call the nurse, and lay aside the remainder of these papers till the afternoon; for I have only a few minutes more to be here."

"No, no, you must wait a bit," cried Abednego. "I have something to say to you. I have a present to make you."

"I want no presents, sir," cried Basil, instantly rising, and preparing for departure. "I never accepted one in my life, save from kinsman or friend."

"From the former, I suspect, my poor Basil, your gifts have been scanty enough," ejaculated Abednego, with a degree of familiarity that served only to aggravate the displeasure of his companion. "As regards the latter, I flatter myself I have as good a title to the name as such flimsy things as Wilberton or Maitland."

"They are my brother officers, *not* my friends," interrupted Annesley.

"Then, how came you to accept from the latter the desk-seal with which you daily close your letters?" demanded Abednego, having thrown young Annesley completely off his guard, and enjoying his uncontrollable start of astonishment at this minuteness of information concerning his private affairs.

"I will not, however, force my benefactions upon you. *I* do not deal in jasper desk-seals; and any day I choose, the Duca di San Catalda will give me a hundred ducats for the miniature I intended to throw away upon you.—Good morning!"

The attention of Basil Annesley was instantly arrested by the name of the Duke of San Catalda. He was eager for a pretext to sit down again, and await an opportunity of renewing the conversation.

"I forgot to tell you, sir," said he, "that among the applicants for the lease of the house in Greek-street, is a picture-dealer who resides in that neighbourhood."

"Apropos to miniatures?" demanded Abednego, fixing his shrewd eyes, with a cunning smile, upon the young man's face.

"Apropos to your own affairs," was the indignant rejoinder of Basil.

"As regards my own affairs, then, be so obliging as to inform my ragged footman, that when Mr. Stubbs calls again—"

"You know him, then?"

"You told me his name, just now."

"I said a picture dealer in Soho. There are dozens upon dozens of such."

"No matter! I know enough of the prying and intrusive disposition of a certain Mr. Stubbs, to feel convinced that *he* is the man who, with the view of entering into personal communication with me on ANY subject, is likely to pretend a desire of becoming my tenant. I desire none such. He is a swindler and a liar. I will have none of him. I say again, let Bill inform the blackguard I will have none of him!"

"You need not address yourself so pointedly to *me*, my dear sir," said Basil, unable to repress a laugh. "*I* am not the advocate of Mr. Stubbs. You might pitch him out of yonder window before I lifted a hand in his behalf. I merely mentioned to you that the boy complains of his coming here every morning between twelve and two, insisting upon seeing you on the subject of your house, conceiving you might be sorry to loso a good tenant."

"A good tenant in Mr. Jeremiah Stubbs? I tell you he has no more real intention of engaging those premises, than *you* of bidding for Northumberland House. Besides, I am in no anxiety about the lease of my house in Soho. I have half a dozen others standing empty; one in Park-lane, one in St. James's-square, and shall soon have one, I suspect, in Arlington-street; for, unless I am much mistaken, I shall be forced to make a crash at Lord Maitland's. I have given him three years' law to redeem engagements, which I knew from the first to be thousands upon thousands beyond his power of redemption."

"Lord Maitland?" exclaimed Basil, aghast.

"Ay, Lord Maitland. Why not, as well as another!"

"But his unfortunate wife and daughters—"

"His wife is some degrees worse than unfortunate. But that is *her* concern, and her husband's. As to their hopeful progeny, it is written that the sins of parents are to be visited on their children; and seldom were less deserving children exposed to ancestral retribution. Like father, like son,—like mother, like

daughters;—all empty-headed fools together. But that his lordship has been trying to defraud me of my due, I should, however, have felt disposed to deal less harshly with him. But when I find a fellow profiting by his privilege of peerage to—"

"Pardon me if I entreat you to give me no unfair insight into the private affairs of my friends," interrupted Basil, again rising from his chair, on finding that they were straying further and further from the miniature.

"You are afraid, eh, of finding your chains of gold mere pinchbeck. You want an excuse to your conscience for continuing to flirt with Lord Maitland's giddy daughters, to eat his pine-apples, and drink his claret, though certain that they are no more his than yours," cried A. O., with a caustic sneer. "What curious calculations might one make, after some royal or noble banquet, of the number and names of the persons at whose real expense the noble guests have been entertained.—Messrs. Grove, the fishmonger,—Giblett, the butcher,—Fisher, the poulterer,—Gunter, the confectioner,—Fortnum, the grocer,—Morel, the oilman,—Cutler, the wine-merchant,—Garcia, the fruiterer!"

"You are making out a very tempting bill of fare, sir," interrupted Basil, anxious to get away. "I can discern a Barmecide's feast through this bare muster-roll of names."

"You are that filthy thing, a *gourmand*, then, as well as the slave of a pretty face?" coolly demanded the old man. "Well, God mend you. In my time, young men were content with the vices of young men. Now-a-days, they monopolize the weaknesses of boyhood and senility,—reconciling all extremes, the follies of beardless chins and hoary beards."

"I must again say good morning, sir, since you seem disposed to take me so severely to task," said Basil, abruptly.

"Before you go, however, I have a service to request of you," said Abednego, suddenly lowering his voice. "Don't be afraid. I am not going to ask you for the *book* again. You have wisely put it into your pocket, and I honour your caution. All I have to request is, that you will break with your own hands the seals you prudently placed on yonder bureau. Here is the key!" said he, producing one which Basil had already noticed under his pillow when they effected the sick man's change of bed.

Having readily complied with Abednego's desire, Annesley stood awaiting his further orders.

"Touch the head of the brass nail to the left of the last pigeon hole," said Abednego, leaning on his elbow, and watching the proceedings of his delegate.

Basil Annesley did as he was required; when, lo! there started up, from the bottom of the old-fashioned bureau, a trap or hide; the well of which contained a variety of articles, apparently of less value than those which lay unguarded and exposed above.

"You will find a brown-paper packet among those trinkets," said Abednego. "Take it out, close the trap, and see that the spring is secure. Then, lock the bureau, and bring me the key and parcel."

More amused than angry at the imperative tone in which those ...ers were conveyed, Basil obeyed.

In another minute, he had laid both upon the pillow; and was again taking leave, when Abednego bade him wait a moment.

With trembling hands, the old man was proceeding to undo the packet.

"Can I assist you, sir?" said Basil, conceiving that it was with this view Abednego had delayed his departure.

The old man answered not a word; though his hands trembled so exceedingly, that it was evident he would have some difficulty in accomplishing his purpose. There was a knot in the slight cord that tied up the packet.

"Better cut it!" said Annesley, after a few minutes lost in infructuous attempts, and presenting a penknife from his pocket-book for that purpose.

"Waste not, want not," murmured the old man, in a feeble voice; and, after another moment or two, Annesley perceived, to his utter amazement, that, in spite of Abednego's homely proverb and deliberate parsimony, his feelings were so deeply involved in his task, that tears were actually falling upon the little packet.

"*Again* thus agitated!" thought Basil. "This must be the very weakness of disease. Twice in one day, for this iron man to evince tokens of sensibility. Yet, *who* would believe me, were I to assert that I had seen tears shed by the stony eyes of A. O.?"

The packet was now open; but Abednego's hands had not ceased to tremble, or his tears to fall.

It contained only a miniature case; and Basil's heart began to beat strongly on recalling to mind the recent allusion of his host to such an object, in connexion with the Duke of San Catalda.

"Accept *this* from me," said Abednego, placing it open in his hands.

And to the utter wonderment of Basil Annesley, he found, on opening the case, that it contained a beautiful enamel copy of Verelst's exquisite picture of the Esmeralda,—the female figure of which presented an unmistakeable likeness of his beloved Esther.

The gift was indeed inestimable. But by what strange series of coincidences was he indebted for such a treasure to the munificence of A. O.?

CHAPTER XIII.

The earth hath bubbles.—SHAKSPEARE.

THOUGH the gift bestowed by Abednego upon young Annesley must, at all times, have been a welcome one, it could not have chanced at a more auspicious moment than now, when, for the first time since the renewal of their acquaintance in England, he found himself banished from the presence of Esther Verelst. He was himself, moreover, on the eve of exile to an opposite quarter of the town; so that even chance encounters in the street were improbable; the company of the Guards to which he belonged being under orders to march into the Tower the day following his acceptance of the miniature from Abednego.

These eastern quarters are rarely inviting to the young men of fortune and family of whom the Guards are composed; unless during the summer months, when they can prevail on their gay friends of the west end to steam it to the Tower, and breakfast with them, on pretence of viewing the lions of the place, and examining the autographs cut in the walls of their mess-room by Peveril of the Peak and other prisoners of note.

But it was just then peculiarly disagreeable to Basil to find himself moated up with Wilberton and Maitland, whose secrets had been accidentally placed in his keeping; or even with Loftus and Blencowe, whose insight into his own and want of delicacy in their railleries on the subject, he had more than once found occasion to resent. There was no remedy, however. With so little hardship to complain of in his military duties, Basil Annesley was conscious that it would be absurd to murmur against a few weeks' banishment to the east end of the town.

It happened, however, that within a few days of taking up his new quarters, he was attacked with indisposition; either the result of his exertion and attendance upon the Money-lender, or of the humid atmosphere of the Tower,* which amounts almost to mal' aria, and, at certain seasons of the year, is sure to engender a low fever in the garrison. In compassion to his illness, perhaps, the two favourite *raws* established for his persecution by his facetious friends, (his intimacy with the Verelsts and with A. O.,) were suffered to heal unmolested.

The first day he was able to shake off his indisposition so far as to visit the West End, in spite of the bantering to which he had been subjected, one of his first visits was to Delahay-street. He was anxious to inquire after his patient,—he was anxious to inquire after *his friend;* for how could he otherwise designate the man to whom he was indebted for the semblance of that beloved face which never quitted his bosom for a moment, day or night? Abednego appeared, indeed, to have contemplated such an appropriation of the miniature; for it was set in a plain gold *fausse montre*, with a loop for suspension round the neck.

"I swear I am now nearly as ill myself," murmured Basil, as he drove along Great George-street, "as poor Abednego on the bitter night I brought him home here—an exploit which, I verily believe, was the cause of all my own indisposition."

At the end of Delahay-street, he got out, and proceeded on foot to the Money-lender's door.

So accustomed was he now to the untowardness of that rugged household, that he did not so much as expect any notice to be taken of his rap at the door for the first ten minutes.

To his great surprise, however, scarcely *two* were allowed to elapse before it was opened; *not* by the rough-headed sweeper, not by the rotund nurse; but by a stranger, an old Jew in all the nursery force of the term, of sinister countenance and squalid attire,—stooping shoulders,—rusty beard,—and the physiognomy of Barabbas!

* Written fourteen years ago.

Now that Basil was certified of the disconnexion of Abednego with the hated tribe to which he *appeared* attached, he could not forbear being surprised and disgusted at his choosing to entertain so unsavoury an individual in his household.

"I wish to speak to Mr. Osalez," said he.

"You vish vat?" demanded the new porter, with an ungracious air.

"I want to speak to your master——"

"To the tevilsh wid your *mastersh*," retorted the Jew, about to close the door in his face.

"I have business with A. O.," cried Basil, resolved to forestal the measure by adopting the phraseology of the place.

"Theresh no A. O. here now. The houshish shold," replied the man. "The houshish mine own;—bought wid mine lawful monish, and vat have you to shay againsht it?"

"Will you favour me with the present address of Mr. Osalez?—He was ill when I left him a fortnight ago, and I am anxious to inquire after him."

"He may be ted now, for vat I or any one caresh!" retorted the Jew—now really fulfilling his intention, and slamming the door in the face of the troublesome intruder.

Gone—vanished like a Will-of-the-wisp! Most provoking—most perplexing! Basil, who had despatched the book back to his mother on the day of his parting from Abednego, with only a few words of apology for the liberty he had taken in borrowing it from her room, had in the interim made up his mind to appeal strenuously to the sympathy of Abednego, for further information on a subject concerning which, at his present age, he felt himself entitled to explanation. The unexpected disappearance of the old man was the heaviest disappointment he could have undergone.

Under a sudden impulse of irritation, instead of quitting the door which had been closed upon him, he knocked loudly.

"Vat ish your pleashure to make dis tevil's noish at my gatesh?' cried the angry new proprietor, instantly reopening it.

"My pleasure is to offer you a sovereign for tidings of the present residence of Mr. Osalez," cried Basil, following the axioms of A. O., and coming at once to the point.

The individual thus abruptly apostrophised, coolly jerked the proffered coin into the pocket of his dirty coat, and referred him to Abednego's former residence in Greek-street.

"Fool that I was, not to think of it myself!" muttered Basil and away he hurried like mad, towards Soho.

Arrived in Greek-street, however, his hopes were again frustrated. Scaffolding was established against the walls; and bricklayers and plasterers were at work. The house was let, it appeared, for twenty-one years; and the workmen knew not so much as the name of the former proprietor.

"I was in hopes they were going to refer me back to Paulet-street," said Basil to himself, in the bitterness of his heart. "Nay, without their reference, it will end in my having to travel once more to St. Agnes le Clare. A better alternative, certainly, than advertising in the Times or Hue-and-Cry for the present abode of A. O."

In the excitement of feeling produced by his disappointment, he even determined on a personal inquiry at the door of Verelst, which he had promised himself never again to approach till recalled by the artist; and though he had the vexation of hearing, syllable by syllable, the same message delivered to him a fortnight before, that the young ladies were "out," and the painter and his wife "engaged," he had at least the comfort of finding that Mrs. Verelst was convalescent.

"The young ladies are well, I hope?" said he, turning away his face as he hazarded the inquiry.

"Quite well, Sir—that is, except Miss Esther, who has been poorly for some time," said the maid, in a confused manner.

"But you said she was out?"

"Yes, Sir,—that is—Sir—the family don't see no more company. I was ordered on no account to let nobody in," said the girl, still more embarrassed. And Basil, vexed as he was, having no further plea for inquiry, had only to express his regret at the young lady's indisposition, and walk away.

He returned that day to the Tower in a mood of mind rendering it extremely fortunate that his companions received him on his arrival with yawns, rather than pleasantries. Maitland and Wilberton were growing too dull to have spirits for quizzing; and finding that he brought them no news from St. James's-street, soon returned to the snooze before a roasting fire, from which his return had bestirred them.

Esther ill—Abednego vanished!—No means of inquiry after either! At his next visit to the West End, Annesley hastened to pay his tardy compliments to Madame Branzini, as a channel by which he might at least gain intelligence of the former. But, alas! the Consul and his wife were at Brighton for the remainder of the holidays.

By degrees the state of suspense to which Annesley was reduced became too intolerable to be borne. In the dreary isolation of the Tower, he had nothing better to occupy his time than to ponder over his perplexities; till he finally became so overmastered by his feelings, as to take the desperate resolution of applying to Wilberton and Maitland for information. He had every reason to infer that *they* at least must be cognizant of the Money-lender's removal; and at the risk of incurring their sneers, boldly inquired one night, as they were separating for bed, whether they could favour him with the present address of A. O.

Each looked at the other,—the one with surprise—the other with indignation. Wilberton with his usual boisterous folly burst into a horse laugh; but John Maitland accepted the question almost as an insult. He had not forgotten Basil's allusion to the Money-lender in Arlington-street, a day or two after A. O.'s awkward appearance on the scene; and felt convinced that Annesley must be aware of his family difficulties.

"You had better look in the Court Guide," said he;—"or in the Directory, under the head of Money-lender. Should these resources fail, I dare say the thief-takers of Bow-street can give you information concerning your friend."

Maitland had quitted the room before Basil recovered breath to reply. Resolved to carry out their mutual explanations on the morrow, when John Maitland's groundless anger would have subsided, he returned to the corner where he had been seated, and, more from listlessness than with any settled purpose, took up from the table the Court Guide, which was lying beside the Annual Army List, (the two classics of London mess-rooms,) and turned to the letter O.

The patronymic of Osalez was too foreign to admit of much expectation of finding it there at all. Nevertheless, immediately preceding a long catalogue of O'Shaughnessy's appeared the name of Osalez three times repeated:—

Osalez, Bernard, Esq., 14, Poland-street.
Osalez, R. Esq., 4, Abbey road, Regent's Park.
Osalez, A. Esq., 74, Bernard-street, Russel-square.

Now, though A. Osalez, Esq., might import Andrew, Augustus, Alfred, Allan,—or fifty other names,—Basil could not for the life of him but hope and believe that the auspicious initial stood for no other than Abednego. There might be dilapidated houses to be bought, sold, or exchanged, in Bernard street, as well as elsewhere. At all events, he was determined that the morrow should clear up his doubts. At the very time he had selected for a clearing up with Maitland, he was approaching the door of a substantial-looking house, in Bernard-street, Russel-square.

"What a thrice double ass I must be," was his secret commentary on his own weakness, "to fancy that such a man as A. O. would allow his abode to become a matter of advertisement in Boyle's Court Guide."

The nearer he approached the house, the more he became assured of his folly. Not a vestige, in the comfortable, clean, and modern residence before him, of the tumble-down nature of A. O.'s habitual resorts; not a token of occasion for a "repairing lease," in Bernard-street, Russels-quare; not a brick discoloured, not an atom of mortar displaced in the pointing. The door was varnished,—the knocker lustrous,—the steps bath-bricked into snowy whiteness, without a speck under the scraper; and the A. Osalez of the Court Guide would have become an old maid of independent fortune, in Basil's apprehension, but for the qualifying designation of "esquire."

"At all events, as I am utterly unknown in this quarter of the town, I can knock and make inquiry,"—cogitated Basil; and the summons having been answered by a grave looking family butler, he was informed, in answer to his formal demand, that "Mr. Osalez was out."

"Has he not been recently indisposed?" demanded young Annesley.

"My master, Sir, is just returned to town."

Recollecting Abednego's diatribe against the ruinous waste of pampered menials, and estimating the expenses (perquisites included) of so respectable-looking a gentleman as he had the honour of addressing at between two and three hundred per annum, Basil almost smiled at his own infatuation in renewing his inquiries.

"I called here for the purpose of inquiring after a relation of Mr.

Osalez,"—hazarded Basil, by way of excuse to the butler for not leaving his card.

"I am not aware, sir, that my master *has* any relations," replied the man, assuming an air of dignity and mistrust; "I have been some years in his service, and never *heard* of any."

"In that case," said Basil, "I am mistaken. I understood that Mr. *Abednego* Osalez was connected with him."

"My master's name, Sir, is Abednego," replied the butler, evidently impatient of so long an interrogatory on so cold a day, the chilly breezes of which had already dislodged a portion of powder from his cauliflower head.

"At what hour is Mr. Osalez likely to be at home?"—inquired the overjoyed Basil.

"I really can't take upon me to say, Sir. His time of returning from the City is very uncertain."

Young Annesley longed to hazard an inquiry what especial business or calling took him habitually to the City. But destitute of pretext for such impertinent curiosity, he found nothing better to say than that he would call again,—nothing better to do than to slink away;—leaving the dignified butler of opinion that he had been summoned from his afternoon doze in the dining-room to very little purpose.

Scarcely had Basil reached the corner of the street, when there drove past him, at a brisk pace, a plain but handsome chariot, to which he would have scarcely raised his eyes in Arlington-street; but which, in the neighbourhood of Russell square, assumed something of an aristocratic grace; and lo! as it glanced along, he caught a glimpse of a head within, which, but for the impossibility of such a transition, he could have sworn to be that of A. O.

"The old man's face is running in my head," said he, vexed at his own folly: "and like Sir Thomas Browne, when writing upon quincunxes, I descry one in every object in nature. Not an old-clothes-man passes me, but I fancy I can trace a resemblance to Abednego. And now, to be equally struck by the likeness of the proprietor of a pair of horses worth four hundred guineas, to a man who grudges himself a hackney-coach!"

At that moment, however, he recalled to mind his collision with a similar carriage, when driving with Blencowe, opposite to Hatchett's, nearly a month before; and the assertion of his companion that its solitary inmate was none other than the renowned A. O.

He had half a mind to return and verify the fact. But already, while trying to recal to mind whether he had actually seen the face of the Money-lender in the brown chariot, on the day in question, he had reached half way across Russell-square; and by the time he retraced his steps into Bernard-street, the carriage had disappeared. He had not courage to re-confront the portly butler in order to ascertain whether, in the interim, it had deposited its inmate at the door of Mr. Osalez.

Moreover, he had a commission to execute for Wilberton at West's, concerning the progress of a new dressing-box, the building of which had only reached the second story, requiring him to be

in St. James's-street at a certain hour, to meet a workman who was to receive orders concerning the admeasurement of the compartments; and there was no time to lose.

Still, the subject nearest his heart was not forgotten amid the perplexities of patent hinges, and the shades of green morocco or purple velvet;—and after taking a sandwich and glass of sherry at the Club, and asking every one in vain for news to carry back to the ark from which he had been permitted to escape, he sent for Wilberton's cab, which he had promised to drive back to the Tower.

"Surely," argued Basil with himself, with singular disregard to metropolitan topography—"it would make little difference were I to drive round by Russell-square, along the City Road? I feel that shall not sleep till I have unravelled the knot of this perplexing mystery."

It is surprising how vaguely we admeasure distances, when they regard the legs and horses of other people. Having convinced himself that he was taking *almost* the nearest way, by half-past five o'clock Basil was dashing along through the lighted streets, towards Bernard-street, Russell-square; where, emboldened by a couple of glasses of sherry, he desired Wilberton's tiger to knock at the door before which he checked his horse, and inquire whether Mr. Osalez were at home.

A footman in plain livery now appeared to reinforce the butler; who having answered in the affirmative, Basil had no alternative but to jump out and follow the servant who was already preceding him to the drawing-room with the name he had received from the tiger, up the richly carpeted and well-lighted stairs.

Basil's heart almost quailed, as he followed his pilot in this vague voyage of discovery. Was it *possible* that this could be the new abode of A. O.? All was as well established and regular as if the proprietor were already a grandfather, succeeding, in virtue of inheritance, to a grandfather of his own.

The door of the drawing-room being thrown open, and the name of "Mr. Annesley" articulately announced, there was no receding; and lo! struck by the unusual gleam of light within, it occurred to Basil, that the rooms were prepared for a dinner party, and that he passed with the servants for one of the guests!

Nor was he mistaken. On clearing the threshold, he perceived that half a dozen grave-looking gentlemen were assembled round the fire-place; one or two seated in cozy arm-chairs, one or two standing chatting together upon the hearth-rug. He would have given worlds to retreat. Never had he felt himself so complete an intruder. Not a face in the room,—all of which were turned towards him,—had he ever beheld in his life.

Nevertheless, the servants had now retired, closing the door behind them; while he looked round in indescribable dismay, hoping to determine, from the attitude of the persons present, which was the master of the house, to whom his apologies were due. But a dead silence had followed the announcement of his name; and no one seemed more particularly surprised than the rest at his joining the party.

At length, this portion of the mystery was explained. A solemn-looking old gentleman, with a high narrow forehead, a pair of nankeen shorts, and discoloured white silk stockings, many degrees inferior in external presentment to the butler, stepped graciously forward from the rug to the carpet, to announce to the confused young man that "Mr. Osalez would make his appearance in a moment,—having had letters of importance to answer, after his return from the City."

Annesley bowed, and tried to be thankful. At all events, he judged that it would be better to await the coming of the master of the house, and make apologies to *him*, than to hurry through explanations unintelligible to the guests, and sneak off with the air of a detected pickpocket. He had time, therefore, to examine the apartment; which, though simply, was richly furnished, having only two or three striking pictures, and two or three noble bronzes by way of ornament.

The conversation his arrival had interrupted was now resumed, though little to his advantage; for not a syllable uttered by the five elderly gentlemen conveyed the smallest meaning to his ear. It was a mystery of which he did not possess the key; being neither more nor less than the jargon of bankers and stock-brokers.

Not daring to seat himself, he stood, hat in hand, awaiting the opening of the door, wishing himself fifty fathom under the foundations of the White Tower, or anywhere else, rather than in a drawing-room in Bernard-street, Russell-square. Had there been women present, he would have felt less embarrassed; the tact and courtesy of the sex readily supplying excuses for the indiscretion of one of his age and appearance. But those five solemn old men, in their knee-breeches and buckled shoes, their white side curls or bald crowns, amounted to the Awful. He would as soon have interrupted a solemnization of the priests of Isis and Osiris in the Great Pyramid.

At length, a step approached the drawing-room door: and though Basil's blood ran cold with nervousness, his cheeks glowed with blushes as the door opened, and the master of the house made his appearance.

"I have a thousand apologies to offer you, gentlemen," said a voice which yielded instant confirmation to the astounding conviction which a first glance had produced in the mind of Basil—"I have a thousand apologies to offer you. A messenger from Downing-street was awaiting my return. I fear I have appeared very long. But dinner will be served in a moment."

Mr. Osalez now shook hands in turn with his elderly guests, addressing to each some distinguished word of compliment. When it came to the turn of Basil to be noticed, the young man's heart sank within him. He was prepared for a start of surprise, a sarcastic reproof. It did not occur to him that, his name having been already privately announced to his host by the servants, no surprise, at least, would be manifested. So far, however, from hearing the sarcasms he had anticipated, even his apologies were forestalled by the well-bred courtesy of Mr. Osalez.

"I rejoice to see you, my dear Annesley," said he. "You must leave it to *me* to apologise to my old friends here for your appearance among them in your morning dress. My invitation, I know, reached you too late, this evening, to admit of your dressing to join our party. You have shown, indeed, far higher breeding than myself, by preferring your own discomfort to keeping others waiting."

So perfect was the self-possession of A. O., while uttering this plausible explanation, that Basil was for a moment really posed to determine whether he might not have been invited, and the letter of invitation missed him.

"Believe me, I had not the smallest intention of intruding upon your party—" he was beginning; but Osalez stopped him short.

"I have sent away your cabriolet till eight o'clock," said he; "that hour will, I believe, admit of your returning in time to the Tower."

There was something so collected and so positive in the manner of his host, that Basil, seeing at once he was resolved to detain him, conceived that the best thing he could do for the furtherance of his own object, was to coincide in the decision of his extraordinary friend.

He had no leisure for deliberation, indeed, for at that moment dinner was announced; and on proceeding to the warm and comfortable dining-room, he saw that a seventh cover had been added to the richly-laid round table.

"Never had Basil felt more embarrassed than on taking his place. Never had he felt more thoroughly out of place than with those grave-looking men and the mysterious host, who, by his manner of disposing of him, seemed to possess some preternatural influence over his destinies. But by degrees, the influence of light and warmth, exquisite wines, and an excellent dinner, exercised their genial influence on soul and body.

Basil had been accustomed to feast with the great. The tables of the Duke of Rochester and Lord Maitland, (at both of which he had been of late a frequent guest,) were cited by the world as uniting all that a first-rate French cook, Italian confectioner, and German *maître d'hotel*, could produce in the way of *savoir vivre*. But it struck him that he had never seen fish, flesh, and fowl, in such exquisite perfection as now; nor was he a little amused to hear the venerable gentlemen treat of such matters, not only with the most intense *gusto*, but as though the City were the fountain head of the good things of this world; and that Billingsgate, Smithfield, and Farringdon, despatched to the West End only their refuse produce, after dedicating the finest to the heavier purses of the aristocracy of Guildhall. He had not been accustomed in Arlington-street to hear turtle and venison treated as things unknown, in perfection, on the western side of Temple-bar!

But it was not the mere gastronomy of the dinner that cheered his heart. It was edifying to see the grave faces of the six old gentlemen relax under the influence of that convivial atmosphere. Warmed by the stimulus of wine such as never before had reached his lips, pure from the wine-press of the sunny south, and mellowed

only by the hand of Time, instead of the drugged and fiery decoctions to which messes and clubs had habituated his palate, they soon expanded into cheerfulness; and he had occasion to note the difference between the man of intelligence and information unfolding his stores under such influence, and the empty noise produced by similar excitement upon his usual companions. You might as well have attempted to intoxicate an exciseman's gauge, as produce more than a certain effect on the well-seasoned brains of these good livers of half a century's experience. With *them*, the opener of the heart and mind served only to bring out, with freer expression, their prodigious knowledge of the world.

And what a world!—How illimitably did Basil's horizon expand as he listened. Hitherto his notions of "the world" might have been geographically defined as "bounded on the north by Marylebone, on the south by Lambeth, the east by St. Martin's-lane, the west by Kensington Gardens. But he now heard Australia, America, and China familiarly talked of as lying within the ring-fence of the kingdom of Mammon. India seemed regarded as a home farm by these old gentlemen; and the Spice Islands as their flower-garden. Their caravans were traversing the wilderness, like the private post of some lordly establishment. As to Europe,—poor, commonplace, domestic Europe,—each had his courier galloping homewards from Petersburg, Vienna, Berlin, like Horse Guards' estafettes, trotting backwards and forwards to Hampton Court or Hounslow. As to Paris, it was a toy; a snuff-box that seemed to lie in their waistcoat-pocket.

While these facts were gradually transpiring, not in the way of vaunt, but the course of conversation, Basil naturally expected that a triumphant glance from the eye of Abednego would furtively intimate to him—"Behold, these be the kings of whom I spake; the kings of Tarsus and Epirus, of Tyre and Sidon. These be the master hands that move the wires of kingly puppets; the mainsprings of aristocratic action; without whom, privy-councils and parliaments might mouth and gibber in vain; the veritable monarchs who make peace and war; the potentates who created the independence of America, who rendered France a citizen kingdom, and would do as much for the British empire, had peer-ridden England the smallest taste for enfranchisement."

But not a look, not a word, not a syllable, implied peculiar significance or understanding between himself and his host. He probably passed, to those elderly sovereigns, as some protégé whom Osalez deigned to admit occasionally to his board; and each in succession took wine with him in the encouraging manner with which they would have patronized a school-boy at home for the holidays. But it was something that they refrained not from their usual discourse in mistrust of the presence of the stranger; but continued to treat of kings and ministers in all quarters of the globe, as so many implements for coining in the hands of those real masters of the world, the money-mongers of its various exchanges.

There was nothing, however, of assumption or braggarty in their self-assertion. In the House of Commons, in the clubs, at the convivial meetings of the West-end, Annesley had been often dis-

gusted by the tone of flippancy or bullying assumed whenever the deferences of life were laid aside. But here, all was decorous as in the Upper House; with the bench of Bishops and the Woolsack, serving as dead weights upon the buoyancy of human nature.

With a magnanimous exercise of power, resembling the quiet lifting of an elephant's trunk, these great financial operators, whose electric wires communicated from one end of the world to the other, would as soon have thought of jesting over the bankruptcy of kingdoms, or the necessities of princes, of which they were treating, as the Home Department of perpetrating a pun over a death warrant.

Still less, however, were they grave or pompous; and many an amusing anecdote transpired connected with the statesmen or measures of the day, which might have told less well elsewhere; but derived peculiar charm from the authenticity certified by the *genius loci*.

For Annesley was beginning to understand with whom he was dipping in the dish. The names by which he heard his companions addressed, were familiar to him attached to loans and other gigantic financial operations, announced by the papers as having audiences of the Chancellor of the Exchequer; men whose signatures, inscribed on a sheet of paper, create a railroad that is to facilitate the intercommunication of kingdoms,—an Argentine Republic,—a county hospital,—or an insurrection in Cochin China!—

Over a dessert, the forced fruit, lime-ice, and Château-Lafitte of which would have caused the Duke of Rochester's eyes to glisten, the host and his most potent, grave, and reverent signiors of guests, sat gossiping of the state affairs of the world, as though their little synod constituted the cabinet council of the universe. They talked of the politics of Europe as men talk of the moves of a game of chess; of sovereigns, as if the ivory or ebony or boxwood pieces of the board. The identity of such privileged portions of human nature was evidently unimportant to their calculations. To the high priests of Mammon, there was no Nicholas,—no Francis,—no Frederick William,—but in their places—Prussia, Hardenberg and Co.,—Austria, Metternich and Co.,—Russia, Nesselrode, *et hoc*.

Of money itself, under the august name of Capital, they treated as he had never heard it treated before, as an end and not a mean; and millions sounded in their mouths less than the ponies or pounds, he was accustomed to hear betted elsewhere. In the arguments of that singular coterie, there was matter to drive thrice as many political economists to distraction!

In the midst of the discussion, young Annesley could not forbear reverting with a degree of amazement amounting almost to the ludicrous, to the sense of compassion with which he had, so short a time before, accosted the old beggar-man of Paulet-street; and the terrors with which, in his necessity for a paltry loan of three hundred pounds, he had undergone his cross-examination in Greek-street, Soho, from the redoubtable A. O.

CHAPTER XIV.

Oh! my weary hours
In my old cell! And yet the fruit thereof
Laughs in the shining, open face of day,
As laughs the dial, moved by clacking wheels,
And sober pullies, hidden from our eyes.—BLACKMORE.

THE pleasantries with which Basil Annesley had been of late persecuted by his brother officers concerning his unaccountable intimacy with the notorious Money-lender, would unquestionably have been renewed on the evening of the day in question, could they have surmised the series of strange events which brought him back flushed and agitated to the Tower, a few seconds before the striking of the garrison hour.

But he offered no explanations; and having two or three important pieces of political news to communicate, acquired among the prophets of the Stock Exchange, besides an anecdote of the Dowager Colonel's having fallen on his nose behind the scenes of one of the theatres, to the displacement of his hat, wig, and proboscis, they let him off without much severity of cross-examination.

It was not till alone, amid the silence of night, that Basil began to inquire of himself whether all that had of late befallen him, were not the mockery of a dream; whether there really existed either an Abednego the Money-lender, or a high-bred and luxurious banker or stock-broker, or bill-broker, bearing the name of Osalez.

Perplexed by his reflections and fevered by unusual excess, he was unable to close his eyes; or if he closed them for a moment, it was to be further derided and perplexed by the confused dreams of indigestion; wherein his mother and Esther were intermingled with the dying man in the old attic in Westminster, and the usurer who had relieved his pecuniary difficulties and bestowed upon him the richest treasure in his possession.

Nor did the morning sun bring its usual comfort or enlightenment. The more he reflected on these mysteries, the more they appeared to darken. He had lost all confidence in his own powers of perception, in his own powers of volition. This strange man, this *ignis fatuus*,—this Djinn, this mysterious influence, appeared to enfold his destinies as with the coil of a boa-constrictor and the capability of crushing him at will; under which persuasion, endured in solitary irritation day after day, the health of Basil, which had been almost re-established, again began to give way. He was soon confined to his room, wanting either power or inclination to cross the drawbridge. Nor was this any source of regret to him. Denied access to the house of Verelst, too proud to seek again that of a man whom he now recognised as rich and powerful, and on whom he had the claim of benefits conferred, he had not the smallest inclination to quit his retirement.

It was a severe season. Though the spring was approaching, a six weeks' frost filled the clubs of St. James's-street with hunting-men,

and augmented the wisdom and divisions of Parliament with the full amount of its county members. Yet Basil was satisfied to remain, day after day, in his quarters. To beguile his *ennui*, he took the opportunity to renew, as Esther had often entreated him, his study of the German language, which, since his departure from Heidelberg, he had suffered to grow rusty. For he had been struck, at his dinner in Bernard-street, with the advantage which those puissant old men derive from their familiarity with modern languages. French, Italian, German, were familiar to them as English; (a circumstance strongly indicative of their foreign origin;) and they appeared to verify the axiom of Charles V., that so many languages as a man possesses, so many times is he a man.

It was in vain his brother officers reviled him by the name of "sap," and protested that Nancy was going to advertise for a place as finishing governess. He adhered to his seclusion, and submitted to be thought a bore, rather than join in pleasures for which he had lost all inclination.

The insight he had incidentally obtained from A. O. into the prospects of Wilberton and John Maitland, rendered it doubly disagreeable to him to see them indulging in habits of expense unsuited to their means; and, as they refused to listen to his remonstrances, or replied to them with repartees concerning the evil principles he was contracting among his Jewish associates, there was nothing for it but to adhere to his pursuits, and pass for a churl.

Meanwhile, fatal confirmation was yielded to the predictions of his mysterious friend, by an announcement which, some weeks afterwards, appeared in the morning papers, that—

"The Duke of Rochester, having broken up his establishment at Rochester House and Wilberton Castle, was about to proceed to Italy, where his Grace's family intended to reside for a period of years."

The news produced considerable emotion in the fashionable circles; not, indeed, the expatriation of the Duke and Duchess of Rochester, for whom, personally, people cared no more than for any other hospitable duke and duchess. But the loss of Rochester House and Wilberton Castle was a serious injury to those butterfly friends who had found, in his Grace's rent-roll of fifty thousand per annum, a gratuitous source of enjoyment.

As Abednego had judiciously observed to Basil during his attendance in Delahay-street, it was no wonder that so *very* popular a man should become a bankrupt; since, to insure the popularity of a duke with fifty thousand a year, it is indispensable he should expend a hundred thousand.

The premature newspaper announcement of the Duke of Rochester's intended departure necessitated, meanwhile, the measure it purported to prognosticate. Beset by claimants, who, so long as his credit laboured only under an imputation of "done up," had refrained from molesting him, in the hope of tempting him to add a few hundreds, or thousands, to the amount of demands they were certain of establishing, with legal interest, against his estate, his Grace was now compelled to bid a precipitate adieu to

the London world, which shines upon us, like the moon, only so long as the sun of our prosperity reflects brightness upon its face; and the original inauthentic announcement of his Grace's intended departure, was shortly followed up by an authentic auctioneer's advertisement, setting forth the details of a sale of the effects of "a distinguished nobleman recently removed to the Continent."

Rochester House, Wilberton Castle, and the heirlooms, were, of course, inviolable; but the furniture of the former, including an unique collection of articles of *virtù*, had been seized by the creditors, and was now on view; described, for the gratification of vulgar curiosity, in advertisements and catalogues, with a waste of pomp, circumstance, and ignorant diffuseness, serving to prove that what is called the public must have a prodigious portion of leisure at its disposal.

One morning, about a fortnight previous to the expiration of his service at the Tower, a fine morning, towards the close of March, which might have been mistaken for a sunny April day, tempted Basil Annesley and Maitland to boat it to the West End; where the chief object of the former consisted in obtaining a glimpse of the house where Esther resided; occasionally leaving a card at the door, with inquiries after the health of the family, to prove that, if excluded from their society, he had not become unmindful of their welfare.

Having fulfilled this chivalrous duty, while Maitland proceeded to Arlington-street in search of letters (the family of Lord Maitland having profited by his being quartered at the Tower to refresh themselves for the London season by a few weeks' sojourn at Brighton), they met again at the club, and found they had still an idle hour to dispose of. Tennis presented itself as the readiest resource. But, on hastening to the court, it proved to be engaged for the remainder of the morning; and, in order to get rid of themselves on the easiest terms, Maitland proposed that they should saunter into Rochester House, which was open to public view, preparatory to the sale of the furniture.

A crowd of carriages of course obstructed the court-yard; for if, as La Rochefoucault assures us, there is something in the sight of the disasters of our friends which is not unpleasing to us, the fact is never more strongly exemplified than in the haste with which London idlers scamper to a sale of the effects of some fashionable bankrupt, at whose expense they have been long entertained.

The rooms were crowded, even to suffocation; almost as crowded and almost as suffocating as for the assemblies and balls of the "popular" Duchess of Rochester; and Maitland and Annesley, who had only a limited time for their visit, began to fear that they should be detained at the head of the stairs till their hour had expired.

Just, however, as Maitland was expressing this opinion to his companion, Basil found himself plucked by the sleeve by one of the auctioneer's men in charge of the furniture, who had mounted guard behind the marble pedestal of a magnificent bronze figure of Mercury, brandishing a candelabrum for a caduceus, which stood in the lobby.

"Shlip in behind here, shir," said the man, "and I'll show ye a crosh-cut into the mushic room, that'll get ye shafe through the crowdsh."

And suiting the action to the word, the man opened a small door in the wall behind him, leading into a small passage; to mask the entrance of which, the niche and statue had probably been devised.

"Another Jewish friend of yours, eh, Nan?" cried Maitland, when, at the end of a small and deserted corridor they found themselves, by passing another masked door opening behind a chamber organ, in the music room; and while Basil attempted to laugh off the favour shown him, which he was as much at a loss to explain as Maitland himself, the men in charge of the rooms, conceiving by the privilege they enjoyed, that the two intruders must be personages of signal mark and distinction, began to overwhelm them with such obsequiousness of service that they were glad to escape into the adjoining picture-gallery.

"By Jove! there's Lady Winterfield coquetting it with Lord Hilford, in the prettiest French bonnet I ever saw!" cried Maitland, with as little interest in the masterpieces contained in the gallery, as he had formerly experienced when visiting the spot as the guest of the Duke of Rochester. "Come along, Nan, and let us interrupt the courtship.—It will be famous fun!"

Basil, however, was firmly rooted to the examination of the pictures.

We may never have occasion to see these *chef-d'œuvres* again!" said he.

"If we don't, what the deuce signifies? But we *shall* see them again. Some fool or other of our acquaintance will be sure to buy the best of them! So, there's a good fellow, come!"

But in spite of his persuasions Annesley remained immovable. Among the pictures were three or four that claimed his earnest and startled attention, from the singular fact of having seen them in progress on the easel of Verelst.

Above all, there was a pair of battle-pieces which could only have been recently purchased by the unthrifty duke, or finished by the needy artist; for one of them contained the identical design of the broken bridge, of which he had watched the original design start to life under the pencil of his protégé.

With eager interest, he instantly referred to the catalogue; and, to his surprise and indignation, found each of the pictures assigned to some ancient master. The pair in question was boldly attributed to no less a hand than that of Salvator Rosa.

"Infamous!" burst involuntarily from his lips, and he was about to disclose to his companion the grounds of his indignation, when Maitland impelled him forward for the amiable purpose of frustrating Lady Winterfield's flirtation. To return to the charge, or even to return to the picture, was out of the question.—They were now inextricably involved in the vortex of fashionable sight-seers.

A little reflection determined Basil to postpone, till the morrow, a more deliberate verification of the imposture of which he was himself convinced; and he consequently acceded to Maitland's request, when, having reached the end of the gallery without elicit-

ing the slightest token of vexation from the fashionable widow, he proposed that they should escape from the throng and make the best of their way home to dinner, while time and tide permitted.

"What a devil of a show up!" was the amiable apostrophe of Maitland, on quitting the court-yard. "I'm sorry for Rochester, because he was really a deuced good fellow. He regularly mounted me for six weeks last hunting season, when I went down to the castle with Wilberton—ay, and capitally too. Mason couldn't have done it better. And then, he plays the best game of piquet in England, or nearly the best! I'm really deuced sorry for him."

"I am still more sorry for his family," observed Basil. "His family are growing up. It is a hard thing for his daughters."

"They have your friend A. O. to thank, I suspect, for the disgusting publicity of this sale."—

"It is not the *sale* for which I pity them, but the occasion of it," observed Basil.

"It wouldn't much surprise me if there were the same sort of crash at *our* house one fine day or other," resumed Maitland, pursuing, as if half unconsciously, his train of reflections!—"I've good reason to know that my father is cursedly dipped; and he wont give up Newmarket. Let what will happen, he wont give up Newmarket. A devil of a look-out for *me*, and worse still for the younger children. I've gone as far as my conscience or my lawyer (and I don't know which is blackest!) would let me, in cutting off the entail; and though the governor and my mother have been badgering me these three months to sanction another mortgage, to enable them to keep up the war, at least till my sisters are married, my duty to those that come after me (eh?—that's the right text, isn't it, for the No-go of an heir apparent?) wont allow me to make ducks and drakes of the last few acres of the family property."

Basil Annesley, feeling that his companion was excited by the scene they had just quitted into somewhat indiscreet revelations, attempted to turn the conversation;—no difficult matter with John Maitland, whose attention, even when matters so serious were concerned as the ruin of his family, was only too easily distracted. The transit from the heated atmosphere of Rochester House to the stirring breezes of the river, soon dispersed every shade of reflection from his countenance.

It was some days before Basil Annesley's course of regimental duty admitted his revisiting the West End; and a whole week elapsed before he was sufficiently master of his time to return to Rochester House. Even then, he had some difficulty in accomplishing his object. But there was not a moment to be lost. The sale had been several days in progress; and on arriving at the door, he found that the pictures concerning which he was so deeply interested, were included in the allotment of that very day.

No carriages *now* encumbered the court-yard. There were a few led horses and grooms of the sort always to be seen near the Houses of Parliament about six o'clock; and an old-looking gig or two. But the greater portion of the court-yard was encumbered with carts, trucks, and hand-barrows, removing articles of furniture sold the preceding day.

The sale of the pictures was proceeding in the gallery itself; and while still in the vestibule, Basil could distinctly hear the sonorous and defying voice of Hummins the auctioneer, and the strokes of his hammer; duly succeeded by the loud clamour of the crowd on the adjudgment of succeeding lots.

Basil cast an anxious glance round the assemblage.—If the truth must be told, he was horribly afraid of descrying among them the face now familiar to him through its varied disguises; either in the squalid array of a Jew broker, or polished and gentlemanly, among the noted connoisseurs of the day; most of whom, glass in hand or spectacles on nose, were present, busied in detecting blemishes in the works of art, or pointing out errors of description in the catalogue, with a view to cheapening the pictures for which they intended to become competitors:—sallow dukes, whose galleries were already stocked to overflowing; *parvenu* millionaires, buying their way to distinction; country baronets, who regarded a fashionable auction as an indispensable ingredient to their season in London; a few real amateurs, ever on the field to profit by the ignorance of others, and purchase a *chef-d'œuvre*, when occasion presented itself, at the cost of a copy; a still more limited number on the watch to purchase objects too high in value, of general competition, as a safe investment for capital; and, in the proportion of ten to one to all these, the usual rabble of an auction-room; picture-dealers, brokers, Jews, pick-pockets, with an auxiliary force of unmeaning idlers, to increase the heat and confusion of the scene.

Two of Verelst's pictures had been disposed of before Basil Annesley entered the gallery; and, as far as he could understand from the dealers around him, at high prices; the one as a Baroccio, the other as an Annibal Carracci, to a nobleman, who, having recently inherited an enormous fortune, was making himself master of pictures, race-horses, and public contumely, at the cost of twenty thousand a-year.

The battle-pieces were just about to be put up; and Basil felt miserably nervous at the idea of hearing described as "matchless works of art," and perhaps sold at the price of such, creations which the poor living artist had drudged to produce for the remuneration of sign-painting.

Nor was he deceived. The auctioneer seemed disposed to exceed himself in his premonitory flourish concerning these "gems of art, the pride of the Rochester collection!"

"The possession from which the noble owner had torn himself with the deepest regret in quitting England," he said, "was the well-known picture gallery which he had formed with so much pains, judgment, and cost, and which it was a scandal to the country that Parliament had not purchased *en masse* for the National Gallery. But of all his Grace's valuable, or rather *in*valuable pictures, it was well known that the accomplished and discriminating duke prized none more highly than his pair of Salvators!"

A few of the more discerning amateurs answered this exordium by a grunt; unwilling to hazard further depreciation, in order

that the moneyed ignoramuses might throw away their capital on pictures secure from *their* wiser competition, so as to leave them without means for the prizes. And when the flowery auctioneer pointedly addressed himself to a nobleman distinguished among cognoscenti, to place the upset price of these "matchless Salvators," without receiving any encouragement in return for the liberty, it was a strange voice from a distant part of the assembly that boldly named one hundred and twenty pounds.

The auctioneer affected indignation, and inquired whether he were "indeed selling one of the most celebrated collections in the wealthy capital of the most enlightened country in the world?" —upon which piece of John Bull-ish clap-trap, a country baronet, touched to the quick of his patriotism, added five sovereigns to the bid, which a Jew broker in the pay of the auctioneer, instantly converted into guineas.

The strange voice from the other extremity of the room, now bid one hundred and thirty-five pounds for the pair; and by a dexterous compliment to the spirit and discernment of the country baronet, this was soon raised by Hummins to one hundred and forty pounds. A competition thus established, the bidding went on briskly and more briskly still; till at length, the incomparable Salvators were on the point of being knocked down to the proprietor of a hundred thousand pounds'-worth of copies and broken-down racers, for two hundred and seventy-five guineas.

"Two hundred and eighty!" cried a voice from that portion of the crowd most encumbered with dealers and brokers; and after some farther sparring, the unseen competitor was declared victor.

The auctioneer looked surprised, or, to borrow an expressive Americanism, consternated; though it is probable, that the proprietor of that "winged voice," if invisible to others, as the cuckoo to an unpractised eye, was perfectly known to Hummins. For the auctioneers of London are as notoriously cognizant of the name and natures of the apparent strangers who frequent their sales, as the shepherds individualize every sheep in their flock.

Having witnessed all he wished to see, Basil was about to quit the gallery, desirous only to certify the name of the rash purchaser. Having reached a table at the further end of the gallery, on which, in the midst of the greatest noise and confusion, a clerk was making entries, he interrupted the man's labours for a moment, to inquire the name of the gentleman to whom Lot 347 had been knocked down.

"Do you wish to purchase, sir?" said the clerk, without raising his eyes from the paper. "Here, Nathan! Nathan Herz! a gentleman who wants to speak to you about the Salvators."

A shabby-looking individual, forward among the bidders in the sale again proceeding, turned round at this apostrophe, exclaiming, "A shentleman vantsh to purshash?" when Basil was inexpressibly startled on recognising in this man, who was simply one of the Jew brokers assembled in a knot at that end of the room, at once the individual who had forwarded Maitland and himself through the private door into the music-room, and the bearded Levite he had found in possession of the house in Delahay-street, the former residence of A. O.

"I have something to say to you in private about those Salvators," said Basil, half unwilling to address so uninviting a personage, and lowering his voice so as to be unheard by the clerk.

"Dey are not for shale, ma tear," replied the Jew, evidently desirous to escape the interview.

"I do not want to buy them. They have been put up under a false description."

"Yesh, yesh—no mattersh—I ashk no questions," persisted the Jew, struggling to get away.

"But since I am able to inform you——" Basil was beginning.

"You can tell noshing, I promish, ma tear young shentlemans; but I don't know better nor yourself," replied the broker. And before Annesley had time for a rejoinder the fellow had disappeared.

"After all, what plea have I for moving in the business?" argued Basil with himself, as, disappointed, heated, and excited, he drove back through the City to the Tower. "The better way will be to write to Verelst, and inform him of the exact state of the case, leaving him to act as he thinks proper. Shut up in his studio from one month's end to the other, the public disposal of these pictures will never reach his ears. Besides, my letter may serve as a renewal of intercourse with the family."

On arriving at home, and before he had time to fulfil or even confirm his purpose, a note was placed in his hands by his servant, sealed with an antique, and having the look of a fashionable invitation. Yet, but for the elegance of its form, Basil would have pronounced the handwriting to be that of the Money-lender.

On tearing open the envelope, he found the following lines:—

"Take no further concern about the pictures. I know all; and purchased them only to expose the villany of a knave and weakness of a fool. "Yours, A. O."

So great was the astonishment of Basil Annesley that he all but allowed the letter to fall from his hands. It seemed to him as if he had only that instant quitted the sale. He had given intimation of his intentions to no human being. Yet already the omnipresent Osalez had found means to penetrate his views, and be beforehand with his warning. *He*, then, was the purchaser of the pictures. *He* who, from his intimate knowledge of the condition of Verelst and his family, must have been fully aware of their unauthenticity; *he* who, from his gift to Basil of a copy of the Esmeralda, had probably employed the poor painter.

Recalling to mind the exquisite nature of the works of art he had seen in Bernard-street, Basil could not suppose that the description contained in an auctioneer's catalogue had for a moment influenced the choice of so critical a judge as A. O.; and at that moment a mortifying suspicion glanced into his mind. Abednego was evidently, in some way or other, in furtherance of some of his petty projects, either in confederacy with, or in authority over, the broker he had seen in possession of the tenement in Delahay-street; and Annesley knew him to have been mainly instrumenta in promoting the ruin and break-up of the Duke of Rochester—first, by his usurious loans, and, lastly, by rapacious persecutio-

What if he had been the means of selling these pictures to the would-be connoisseur, and was, *therefore*, eager to get them once more into his possession?

Indignant at the suspicion, or, rather, indignant with himself for having conceived it, Basil resolved to reply by a few lines, which he intended to leave in person in Bernard-street, acquainting Mr. Osalez of his resolution to enlighten the mind of Verelst upon a point so essential to his interests as the speculations founded by picture-dealers on his imitations of the ancient masters.

The following morning, after breakfast, he was quitting the mess-room for the purpose of addressing Verelst, when Maitland, who was sunning himself in the wide window-seat to peruse his favourite Morning Post, suddenly exclaimed—

"Hillo, hillo! you were at the sale yesterday, at Rochester House, weren't you, Nan?"

"Only for a short time."

"And what was your sapient opinion of the pair of Salvators?"

"That they were very fine pictures."

"Come, come, no hedging. I mean did you consider them originals?"

Basil's colour rose to his temples at the inquiry.

"Because, if you did, my fine fellow," resumed Maitland, "you were among the knowing ones who appear to have been deucedly taken in. Look here! A letter from Hummins, the auctioneer, apologising for having been made instrumental to an imposition on the public, and stating that the pair of battle-pieces forming part of the gallery of his Grace the Duke of Rochester, and yesterday sold as such for the sum of 310 guineas, are the original productions of a German artist of the name of Verelst, whose works are beginning to acquire considerable value in the trade, and, furthermore, that they were purchased as originals by his Grace the Duke of Rochester, for the sum of fifteen hundred guineas, from a picture-dealer of the name of Stubbs, residing in Frith Street, Soho. Then follows a flourish about Hummins's value for his own reputation, his conscientious discharge of his duties to the public, and so forth. There! Read it yourself! Your *protégé's* fortune is made, it seems. I shouldn't be surprised to find that you bribed Hummins to oversell the pictures, and paid for the advertisement. Unless I am much mistaken, Stubbs is the name of one of the ruin-mongers who make a fool of my mother. The very brute, by the way, who brought no end of annoyances on the family, by transferring one of my father's acceptances (to pay for the carved furniture of that accursed suite of *moyen age* rooms at Maitland Park, which I never enter without feeling as if I should catch the plague!) to your Jewish friend Barabbas—the extortioner A. O."

Luckily, this taunt was unheard. Basil was thoroughly absorbed in the perusal of Hummins's letter. Having made himself master of the contents, he hastily quitted the room.

Little had he expected, after his long and regretted alienation from the Verelsts, to prove the means of a discovery likely to produce so advantageous a change in their fortunes. Never had

Basil felt so happy. It was a balmy April day; and he ascended with gladsome steps the stone bastion overlooking the river, fancying that he had never before beheld its dingy current ripple so gaily in the sun.

Spring was rapidly advancing; and even for those denizens of London who do not divide the year into three months of season and nine months of blank, the town was beginning to wear a pleasant aspect. Flower-carts and water-carts jogging side by side through the streets, conveyed to the smoke-dried citizens an idea that, somewhere or other, the sun was shining, and the sky so murky over their heads, exhibiting the cerulean hue of the poets; and, by degrees, the sickly roots of primroses, hawked about by flower-girls, whose faces bore superficial indication of the fact that flesh is dust, gave place to bunches of faded lilacs, destined to be transferred in broken water-jugs, to the window-ledges of all the by-ways of the metropolis, as too potent of scent to be borne within.

Even on the pendant streamers lining the fœtid depths of a deserted well, once, at least, in the day, the vertical sun sheds its reviving light; and even into the most dismal lodging of the least cheerful capital in Europe, summer infuses for a moment its cheering influence.

The Verelsts were happier now than in the trying winter season. The invalid could be wheeled to the window for change of air: and the girls, when proceeding to give their daily lessons, were less exposed to vicissitudes of weather.

But they had other causes for gladness. The more advantageous bargains made by Verelst, under the management and protection of Basil Annesley, were beginning to bring forth their fruits. They were getting, in some degree, above the world; and the comfort of seeing her family better clothed, better fed, and without fear for the morrow, had done more to restore strength and courage to Mrs. Verelst than all the previous advice and medicaments of the physicians.

Placed at ease in his circumstances, by the sale of his military sketches, the artist had ventured to give once more the reins to his imagination in the completion of a picture representing the Johanna von Orleans of Schiller bidding adieu to her native valley, which had been admitted among cart-loads of works of art more or less deserving to the annual exhibition. For the twentieth time in his life, therefore, the artist was smoothing the plumage of a new-fledged hope; a bird of promise which, like the Phœnix, has the faculty of giving birth from its ashes to a successor fresh and fair as the one of recent extinction.

The girls, meanwhile, had been objects of unusual solicitude to the good Branzinis; who, the longer they were acquainted with the gentle disposition of the accomplished governess of their children, became more and more convinced of the merit of the family; and delighted in every occasion of brightening their joyless existence.

These music-parties,—these operas,—these cheerful little dinners, however, though accepted with gratitude by Mrs. Verelst for her

daughters, were far from affording pleasure to Esther and Salome, now that there was no longer a chance of meeting Basil Annealey!

To *them*, his disappearance from among them was fraught with mystery. They knew nothing of his being quartered in the Tower. They knew nothing of their father's letter, or interdictions. And though accidentally apprised that their former friend appeared, from time to time, at the door, with inquiries after the health of their mother, this total change in their habits of intercourse increased rather than diminished their surprise. Salome's frank expressions of regret at his absence had produced from her parents the most chilling reproof; and ever since, by tacit consent of all parties, the subject was dropped.

The lodgings inhabited by the Verelsts were of such circumscribed dimensions, that the two girls slept in a small room within that of their mother, upon whom they took it in turns to attend day and night; so that there was no opportunity for those sisterly confidences which, in more splendid households, are the origin of such waste of time and sensibility. Nevertheless, Esther sometimes found a moment to whisper to Salome that it was strange Basil should so suddenly have withdrawn his interest from them; just as, occasionally, Salome found means to express to Esther her wonderment whether it would ever enter into her father's plans to return to Germany; and whether, even if they went back to their beloved Heidelberg, they might not find the Count von Ehrenstein a happy husband and father.

Such was the position of their affairs, and such the monotonous tenour of their existence, unconnected with the passing events of the day by even the perusal of a newspaper, unless occasionally at the house of the Neapolitan Consul, when one morning, as the artist was standing absorbed before a canvas, on which he was beginning to sketch, with some enthusiasm, the rude outline of a new historical picture, he was roused from his reverie by a slight touch on the shoulder, and found that a stranger was standing behind him:—a man of simple but gentlemanly exterior, who, unobserved by the artist, had been introduced into the room by the servant on the plea of business with her master.

"I have the pleasure, I believe, of addressing Mr. Verelst," said he, "whom I have had more difficulty in tracing out than ought to have been the case with the painter of such works as I see around me."

As he spoke, the visitor glanced towards the two pictures from the *Niebelungen Lied*, which still occupied their post against the wall; and the simple artist who, from the seclusion of his habits of life, was becoming daily less and less a man of the world, felt so puzzled by hearing compliments addressed to himself by a man of such courtly manners, stood gazing in amazement, as if puzzled to determine whether he were not the victim of a mystification.

"I have reason to imagine," resumed the stranger, "that a painting representing the Marriage of Cana, which I bought nearly a year since, of a picture-dealer of the name of Stubbs, as the work of Poussin, is in reality a production of your pencil. And though I plead guilty to having been the dupe of my own ignorance in the

purchase, (for after all the detection of the fraud rested with myself,) it grieves me much to believe that, of the four hundred guineas I paid for it, perhaps not a tenth part reached the hands of the artist with whom it originated."

"Not a *twentieth* part!" rejoined Verelst, with a smile. "I remember the picture only too well. I had grounded great expectations upon it; but was forced, by the necessities of my family, to sell it at a moment's notice for a paltry ten-pound note!"

"*Ten pounds!*" reiterated the stranger, shrugging his shoulders. "The rogue—the robber! I had a hard matter to get it from him at less than the five hundred guineas he originally asked me. I have bought many other pictures of him, at high prices, of some of which perhaps you may be able to indicate the true origin, which I am now beginning to suspect as bringing sad discredit upon my connoisseurship. With this view, sir, I have been making strenuous efforts to discover your abode. As some inducement to you to accord me the favour of a visit to my collection, I would willingly induce you to bring with you the two noble pictures I see on your hands, if, indeed, the value you set on them be not above my reach."

As he spoke, the courteous customer began to examine with care and interest the pair of pictures, on which the disappointed artist had almost ceased to pride himself, or found expectations of profit.

"I once prized these pictures, as a partial man is too apt to prize his favourite work," said Verelst, standing beside his visitor to contemplate his neglected pictures.—"I once rated them at a couple of hundred guineas! But I am sick of the sight of them; and should be glad to dispose of them for a quarter of the sum."

"That were a most unjust self-injury," observed the stranger, "particularly where the original appraisement was so modest. On the contrary, I shall be most happy to write you a cheque for the full amount. You are, in fact, doubly entitled to it, for I have every expectation of obtaining through your testimony, restitution of the price of my pretended Poussin."

Verelst began to stammer expressions of surprise and thankfulness. But the visitor interrupted him with a request for pen and ink.

"If you present this draft at Coutts's," said he, offering to Verelst a printed paper he had taken from his pocket-book, "you will find it honoured; after which, I shall ask you the favour to bring the pictures in person to my house."

Verelst, having glanced, as well as his confusion would permit, at the name subscribed to the bottom of the cheque, saw with pride and exultation that it was that of the Marquis of——; a nobleman honoured by the high estimation of artists and men of letters.

"If you can so arrange your engagements," added the Marquis, interrupting his acknowledgments, "you would do me an additional favour by bringing them at twelve o'clock; at which hour you would find a vacant place at my breakfast table, and meet there

the gentleman to whom I am indebted for the discovery of the fraud practised upon me, as well as of your name and address: an enlightened patron of the arts, doubtless known to you by name,—my friend, Mr. Osalez."

A faint cry bursting from the lips of the artist's wife, intimated at that moment, for the first time, to the Marquis, that a third person was present at the interview, and that the easy chair placed beside the open window with its back towards them contained the emaciated form of Mrs. Verelst.

Agitated by a thousand conflicting emotions, on learning the tide of good fortune which would enable her husband to discharge those obligations to the offending Basil, which had weighed heavily on the minds of both, the poor invalid had been unable to control the revulsion of feeling occasioned by the discovery that they were indebted for this overpowering benefit to the interposition of A. O.

CHAPTER XV.

They were all aliens:
Thou wert the adopted of our house.
COLERIDGE'S "*Wallenstein.*"

ON taking possession of his old lodgings on his return from the Tower, the first circumstance communicated to Basil by his landlord was, that a shabbyish-looking person had called repeatedly with earnest inquiries concerning the moment and manner of his arrival.

"A gentleman?" inquired Basil, who, being out of debt, had less apprehension of shabby-looking persons calling with inquiries, than might have been the case with Maitland or Wilberton.

"Why, I should say, yes, sir," replied the man, "though there warn't much matters to boast of in the coat on his back. But he spoke like a person of eddication."

Basil smiled approvingly at the distinction, which did not, however, assist his guesses. At length, it occurred to him so strongly as to bring the colour to his face, that the mysterious stranger was most likely the Protean Abednego; a suspicion fully confirmed by the information which his minute inquiries now managed to elicit.

"And he said he would call again?" demanded young Annesley.

"This evening, sir; he said he would be sure to look in this evening."

And the tone of glee in which the young guardsman hastened to give orders that the moment his strange visitor arrived he should be admitted into his sitting-room, relieved the mind of the landlord from a suspicion that "a small account,"—a name usually given to a very large one, had been the cause of his spontaneous change of colour.

"I shall come home immediately after dinner to meet this gentleman," observed Annesley; "but if by chance he should arrive here first, you will oblige me, Mr. Smith, by detaining him till I come."

Thus adjured, Mr. Smith lost no time in converting the shabby-

genteel man into a rich uncle of eccentric habits; and, accordingly, when the stranger *really* made his appearance, he was received with all the state and ceremony due to the ambassador of one of the great powers.

Ten minutes only had he been seated, however, in the favourite arm-chair of Basil, beside his shaded reading lamp, when the young man, who had hurried home from the house-dinner of the club, entered the room.

"*Verelst!*" cried he, starting at sight of his unexpected guest; "this is indeed a most agreeable surprise. I was afraid you had dismissed me altogether from your recollection."

"It is not so easy to dismiss those altogether from our recollection, Mr. Annesley," gravely rejoined the artist, "towards whom we have heavy obligations."

"If such be your only motive for remembering me," cried Basil, warmly, "God knows I have little desire to occupy a place in your memory. Unless remembered as one towards whom, in a foreign country, in sickness and neglect, you did the part of a kinsman, one whom you admitted to sit beside your household fire, one to whom you conceded almost the privileges of a son, one who has never ceased to regard you as a father, I would fain be forgotten."

Basil flung down his hat impetuously on a chair while uttering this tender expostulation; to which Verelst replied only by turning away, as if seeking for some papers he had placed on the table beside him. But Basil fancied when the old man again addressed him, that there was a kindly moisture in his eye, as though his own words had not been utterly disregarded.

Still, the painter attempted no direct reply to the appeal.

"I am come, sir," said he, evading the question of such reminiscences, "with a thankful and rejoicing heart, to discharge the obligations you so nobly conferred upon me. It would have been easy to do so by letter, or through the intervention of a third person. But I was unwilling, my dear Mr. Annesley, you should a moment suppose that, because able to return back the exact tale of moneys you generously disbursed on my account, I had become unmindful of the favour, never to be forgotten, which your timely aid bestowed with them on me and mine.—Letters are cold and dry in the expressions of such feelings as now swell within my bosom. Nor should I have found it easy so to define my own sentiments as to render you sensible with what fervour I and mine recognise the extent of our obligations, without overlooking the cruel manner in which you have attempted to force your way into the painful secrets of a family, which had withheld nothing else from your participation."

"As I live and breathe, my dear Verelst," cried Basil, eagerly, "I have not the most remote suspicion to what you allude: nor did I ever, in your case or any other, attempt to possess myself unhandsomely of the secrets of other people."

The artist gravely shook his head; and taking from the pocket-book beside him three notes of one hundred pounds each, placed them in the hands of Basil, who had now seated himself on the opposite side of the table.

"I am glad you bring me these," cried Basil Annesley, laying them carelessly down, "because it is a proof that you are more prosperous than when I had the happiness of enjoying your society. But what is the return of this money compared with that of your friendship? I fondly trusted, on seeing you under my roof, that you were come to tell me my unknown offence was forgiven; that you had repented your injustice towards me; that you were again about to open your arms and heart to one who has no desire on earth so urgent as to find them unclosed to him as of old. I swear to you, dear sir, that never, from the first moment of our acquaintance, have I cherished a thought or feeling towards you that was not kindness itself."

"In that case," replied the artist, evidently much moved, and gazing sadly upon the agitated young man, "in that case why insult my wife by disclosing to her that you have discovered her family connections with one who—but no matter!"

"On my honour as a gentleman," cried Annesley, "I have made no discoveries—I have intentionally offered no insult. As regards the family connections of Mrs. Verelst, she may be, for anything I know to the contrary, the daughter of a peer or the daughter of a peasant. I never heard—I never inquired even her name. It was enough for me that I knew her to be everything that is amiable, gentle, and patient; the kindest of mothers, the most devoted of wives. In what way the book, which appears to have constituted my ground of offence, could have interested her feelings, I am wholly at a loss to surmise. By a strange fatality, however, the very same volume proved to be of equal importance in the eyes of a person singularly interesting to myself—a Mr. Osalez—more widely and less satisfactorily known under the name of A. O."

"You have said it!" exclaimed Verelst, almost shuddering.

"What have I said?" inquired the astonished Basil.

"You have named the man by whose vindictive persecutions the heart of my poor wife was broken."

"Persecutions?" exclaimed Annesley. "Surely, surely, you must be mistaken. Chance has brought me somewhat familiarly acquainted with this strange individual; and as far as my observation reaches, I have found him the enemy only of his own comfort; generous to others, to himself alone parsimonious; even then wilfully and waywardly, as if in vengeance or atonement."

"What should *you* know of him compared with my poor Rachael?" faltered the artist, agitated by recurrence to the subject evidently so painful. "How should chance have taught you more of his character and motives than is known to *her*?"

"Pardon me," replied Basil. "Circumstances which I will hereafter explain to you, make it evident to me that it is Mr. Osalez who, by liberal expenditure of time, trouble, and money, has been the means of bringing to light the impositions so injurious to your prospects as an artist, which have been recently exposed in the newspapers. It was my intention, had you not visited me to-night, to take an early opportunity of apprising you of the fact."

"I am aware of it," replied Verelst, coldly. "The Marquis of

——, by whose munificent patronage I have been enabled to discharge my obligations towards you, informed me that it was to Mr. Osalez he was indebted for his knowledge of my address. But since acquainted with it, since himself resident in this country, and aware that my unfortunate family had been driven hither for refuge, what but the most cruel and revengeful obduracy prevented his offering the crumbs from his table to appease the hunger of his nearest kindred?"

Basil Annesley started from his seat to listen.

"Even if disposed to persist in his animosities against myself," resumed Verelst, "what pretext was there for withholding from his poor sister the aid that might have assuaged the pangs of sickness, and relieved the anxieties of a mother trembling for the destiny of her girls?"

Pale as death, and scarcely able to articulate, Basil could now only falter, "Sister! Mrs. Verelst *sister* to the notorious A. O.?"

Verelst appeared surprised in his turn.

"A few minutes ago," remonstrated the artist, "you were advocating his cause. You even assured me that chance had brought you familiarly acquainted with circumstances inspiring high respect for his character."

"I repeat it."

"Yet you apply in scorn to his name, the epithet notorious!" interrupted the artist.

"Say rather to his *calling*," retorted Basil Annesley.

"In commercial England, you have surely little right to despise it," observed Verelst, in some amazement.

"Commercial England has her fair and legitimate modes for the disposal of capital," observed Basil, somewhat nettled.

"I had always fancied that exchange speculators, so long as prosperous, occupied an important position in the moneyed world,', replied Verelst. "Without them, how are the finances of kingdoms to be carried on? The father and grandfather of my wife were the wealthiest merchants in Cadiz. Osalez, excited by the advantages of an English education, entertained higher ambitions. On the death of his father, he gathered together his enormous capital, and renouncing the hazards of commerce, attempted a career which, but for the accident of his singular personal disappointments, might have sufficed for his happiness. Of that period of his life, it becomes me not to speak. But when enabled, later, to resume his position in society, it was surely insufficient to couple his unblemished name with an unhandsome epithet, that it became one of the most accredited and widely known of those which convulse the Stock Exchanges of the various capitals of Europe."

"Some of the first financiers and most respected men in the country have been stockbrokers," cried Basil. "But a money-lender—an advertising money-lender!"

"How mean you?" cried Verelst, growing pale in his turn.

"The money that now lies so unsatisfactorily before me," observed Basil, "enables me to inform you, without further scruples of delicacy, that I should have been exposed to some personal difficulty

by the payment of the bills I accepted in your favour, but for having raised the sum in demand by the assistance of a common usurer, whom I *then* believed to be a Jew, and knew only by his ill repute in the world, under the opprobriated name of A. O."

"And these inconveniences, this hazard, you incurred so generously for our sake!" cried the artist, seizing his hand, and losing all interest in the disclosure more immediately concerning his family, on discovering the real amount of his obligation to Basil. "Fool that I was! How little, how *very* little did I conjecture the truth! I fancied you were obliging me out of the overflowings of an abundant fortune, and even then was grateful. But that you should have hazarded for our sake the shame of the spendthrift, the cares of the prodigal; that you should have been forced into contact with the vile and degraded. Oh! Basil,—oh! Mr. Annesley,—this touches me to the quick!"

And reading in the expression of his young friend's countenance a degree of emotion almost equal to his own, Verelst, without further effort to contain his feelings, threw himself upon the shoulder of Annesley, and wept like a child.

"And we presumed to find fault with you," faltered the artist, raising his head after some moments of absorbing agitation. "We dared to condemn you; to call you proud; to suspect you of an intention to offend and insult us."

"You cannot surely have been so unjust!" cried Basil, starting from his embrace. "Surely your wife—your daughters——"

"My wife could assign no other interpretation to your conduct in suddenly placing before her a book, formerly the property of, and bearing the names of her father and brother; by the former of whom, she had been cast off on account of her improvident marriage; by the latter, visited with still bitterer perseverance of vengeance."

"I have only to reiterate my assurances that I had not the most remote suspicion of the nature of the inscription, or the meaning of the initials," said Annesley. "I borrowed the work from my mother's library, with no other object than to afford you entertainment. How it ever came there, must become the subject of close, and I fear vexatious inquiry. Very little, alas! did I surmise your kinsmanship with a man so disgraced in the eyes of the world as the individual whose initials, as I then supposed by the effect of chance, were inscribed in its pages."

"And yet," said Verelst, "you assure me that you can certify the interposition of Osalez in my professional career?"

"Believing you to be utter strangers to each other, I fancied he was interesting himself in your behalf, as he would have done in that of any other man of genius lying under the scourge of evil fortune. But, advantageously as I am prepared to think of Abednego in comparison with those who judge him only as a Jew,—a miser,—an extortioner,—there are revolting mysteries both in his character and circumstances, which I am wholly unable to solve. The more I ponder on all I know of him, the more I become perplexed by that which I am unable to understand. At one moment, I believe him to be one of the greatest, at another, the meanest of human

beings. In him, all extremes appear united: opulence and penury,—generosity and baseness,—enlightenment and ignorance,—liberality and prejudice,—tenderness and brutality!—How am I to reconcile all this?"

"But during the intimate intercourse you appear to have held together," demanded the artist, "did Osalez never become aware of your interest in my professional fortunes, or give you to understand the bond of kindred blood uniting him with my wife?"

"Never!—never in the slightest degree!" cried Basil Annesley. "Yet, now I think of it, I remember hearing him refer to your position as an indigent artist; a proof that the adversity of his excellent sister must have been known to him."

"Till within a few weeks," observed Verelst, "we were ignorant of his social position in this country: and aware of his antipathy, and dreading further persecution, my wife had not courage to address him with representations of the abject nature of our own. It was, thanks to that very picture-dealer whose knavery has been the means of presenting me to the Marquis of ——, (from whom I have already received orders that will keep my easel in activity for years to come,) I had grounds for conjecturing that a picture of mine, a design from the 'Notré Dame' of Victor Hugo, had fallen into the hands of the wealthy brother of my wife. Even then, I knew not his abode,—I conceived not his riches and consequence. Nay, I believed him to have fallen considerably from his high estate, till apprised yesterday, by my noble patron, of his prosperity. Little did his lordship imagine, when apologising to me at his breakfast-table this morning, for the absence of the enlightened patron of the arts to whom he was indebted for his knowledge of my works, that he was talking to me of a brother!"

"More irreconcilable incongruities!" exclaimed Basil, greatly depressed by his discovery of a connexion which he knew would be more fatal to the interest of his affection, with his mother, than the fact that his beloved Esther was a teacher, and the daughter of an artist; inasmuch as a remote allusion to Jewish partialities had been the cause of driving Lady Annesley to frantic exasperation.

"That very picture of the Esmeralda," resumed the artist, "affords further proof of the eccentricity of character of poor Osalez;—nay, but for my certainty of his infirmities of mind, I should be wholly unable to account for such inconsistency. While avoiding or injuring his sister and her family, he was induced, it seems, to give hundreds of pounds for a work of inconsiderable merit, simply because the principal figure is a likeness of his once-loved Rachael!"

"Far more so of her daughter," added Basil, in a lower voice.

"You knew not my dear wife in her days of youth and beauty," faltered the artist. "The patient invalid, the smiling drudge, the humble artist's wife, presents but a poor shadow of the worshipped, the lovely, the triumphant Señora Osalez, who could not pass from her father's carriage to the steps of the church or theatre, but the idlers of Cadiz crowded to feast their eyes on her more than Oriental beauty; endowed with the intelligence and accomplishments of Europe, yet glowing with the riper tints of a sunnier clime."

"I have seen all this, sir, in your daughters," again hesitated Basil.

"Esther and Salome are lovely girls, as well as the most duteous of children," observed Verelst, with deep feeling. "But neither the one nor the other deserves comparison with her mother at the period when she forsook the gorgeous mansion of her father, to become the bride of the enthusiastic German artist, who dedicated to her beauty every impulse of a fervid soul, and had, alas! nought beside to offer to her acceptance. The Marquis informs me," added Verelst, after a long pause, during which he seemed labouring to overcome the struggle of his feelings, "that large as was the price given by Osalez for my Esmeralda, he has offered him double the money to part with it, but in vain. I cannot help fancying that, in spite of his apparent indifference to his sister's welfare, Abednego was unwilling her portrait should pass into the hands of a stranger."

"That can hardly have been the case," observed Basil, fancying he was about to flatter the self love of the artist. "On the contrary, it must have been the intrinsic value he discerned in the execution of the picture that rendered him so tenacious; since it was from his own hands, and as a free gift, that I obtained this copy."

While thus explaining himself, Basil drew forth from his bosom, where, by day and night it was fondly treasured, his enamel copy of the Esmeralda.

"What means this?" cried the astonished Verelst, regarding at first sight the miniature in no other light than as a portrait of his wife. "Say, say! what means this? The likeness of my poor Rachael in your possession?"

The explanations rendered necessary by the emotion of Verelst, aroused Basil Annesley to a sense of his own imprudence. It was impossible to give a colouring to his singular value for that lovely face, otherwise than startling to the painter.

"And you have been wearing it thus, then,—wearing it next your heart,—wearing it as we treasure only the gift of affection, the pledge of fidelity," cried Verelst; "and all the while we were accusing you of an intent to mortify us,—of coldness,—of—"

"Spare, spare me these vexatious truths," cried Basil, eagerly.

"To *you*," resumed Verelst, after having hurriedly examined the beautiful execution of the miniature. "To *you* it doubtless serves to retrace, in combination, both young and old of the grateful family of the artist on whom you have conferred such generous obligations."

Basil Annesley struggled for a moment with his feelings. However afraid of alarming the pride and susceptibility of Verelst, he would not submit to such a misconstruction of his sentiments. He satisfied himself, however, by adding, in a subdued voice, "It serves, at least, to recal to me the face which unites in my estimation all that is fairest, holiest, and dearest in human nature."

The simple artist listened with delight, but wholly without enlightenment. It seemed to *him* the most natural thing in the world, that his old pupil, his generous friend, should love Esther

and Salome, and pronounce them dear and holy,—they, whom he had known as children and appreciated in their womanly discharge of filial duty. But that he should love either of them singly and separately, or one of them more than the other, never occurred to poor Verelst.

"You have received a commission, then, from the Marquis?" inquired Annesley, by way of giving a new turn to the conversation.

"A commission that delights me," cried the painter, with enthusiasm; "for it will enable me to realize my highest ambitions. I am to paint in fresco the new gallery of his castle in the North; a series of designs from English history! For this, by the way, I must read as well as paint."

"But by such an engagement, you will be compelled to remove your family from town?" cried Basil, in a tone of consternation, on beholding his newly-erected castles-in-the-air precipitated in a moment to the ground. "Under such circumstances you will stand in need of funds previous to receiving the remuneration due to you; and I earnestly entreat you, as a friend on whom you have conferred obligations, and who has consequently a claim to priority of service in return, to appropriate to your own use the notes you have forced upon me. At some future time, when you become rich, as you now cannot fail to do, you shall repay the money. I promise you that it will be an act of charity to secure it; for nearly a year will elapse before it becomes due to A. O., from whom I borrowed it on interest; and in the interim, if lying idle in my hands, it might lead me into a thousand scrapes. It might teach me to become a prodigal, a gambler, a coxcomb,—Heaven knows what! —Money, you know, my dear Verelst, is the corrupter of all human hearts."

"Your arguments, my dear Mr. Annesley, are kind as they are specious," replied the artist. "But my noble patron has rendered your assistance needless. Aware of my difficulties, he has generously presented me with a couple of hundred pounds in advance. I am rich, my dear young friend,—rich,—rich,—I was about to say rich as a Jew—but that the word is in utter distaste in my family. Trust me, I am fully enabled to remove them all to the North in ease and comfort."

"But surely," cried Basil, horror-struck at such a prospect, "surely so long a journey, with such uncertain prospects at the close, will be disadvantageous to Mrs. Verelst, whose infirm state appears to demand the utmost care and consideration?"

"Rachael would suffer twenty times as much, my dear sir, by separation from her husband. As to accommodations, the Marquis has assigned to our use a suite of apartments in the castle."

Here was a new source of anxiety for Basil. Esther, his own Esther, exposed to the injurious admiration which her beauty must necessarily call forth in such a house.

"Nevertheless," said he, attempting a new line of argument, "such an interruption to the engagements of the Miss Verelsts——"

"Engagements?" interrupted the proud father; "you surely do not suppose that, now I am able to earn bread for them, I will allow them to waste their precious talents in teaching idiotic

children or languid misses?—No, no, no!—no more engagements for my girls!—It is one of my chief sources of joy on this occasion, that henceforward those dear children may live for the enjoyment of life,—for the embellishment of life,—for the delight of others, as ever, ever, of their fond and happy parents!—No, no!—No more engagements for Salome and Esther Verelst."

Basil was inexpressibly touched by the utter forgetfulness of self manifest in the calculations of the good old man.

"Yet surely," said he, unwilling to abandon all hope of their future society,—"surely such utter seclusion as will await the young ladies at the castle——"

"They will not *both* bear us company," replied Verelst, calmly, little suspecting the pain he was about to inflict. "Salome is to go down with her mother: but, at present, Esther will remain on a visit to Madame Branzini. All was settled this morning. The Duke of San Catalda would not hear of her quitting London just now; and after some contestation, I acceded to their united request."

Basil Annesley had not strength or courage to give utterance to the question that rose to his lips—"They are engaged, then,—positively engaged?"

He could only stagger to a seat, and press his hand to his heart with the consciousness that its warm impulses of hope and affection were crushed for ever.

Shocked by his sudden change of countenance, Verelst was starting forward with inquiries into the nature of his seizure, when lo! the door opened; and unannounced and unaccompanied, there appeared on the threshold the striking figure of A. O.

CHAPTER XVI.

Oh! this yellow plague,
That crusts our hearts with foul and festering sores.
VANE.

It was now the turn of Verelst to change countenance; and a succession of strong emotions were portrayed on the open physiognomy of the painter, incapable of artifice or disguise. Surprise, vexation, satisfaction, perplexity, obtained by turns the mastery. There were tears in his large grey eyes;—there was determination in the lines surrounding the firmer and more expressive mouth.

His brother-in-law, on the other hand, betrayed not the slightest touch of feeling. Master of himself, hardened to habits of dissimulation, whatever emotions might be swelling in his heart, the countenance of Abednego was undisturbed. Though apprised that Basil was engaged with Verelst, he had still sought the interview. Nay, it soon became apparent that his visit was produced by the expectation of finding his brother-in-law with his young friend.

On recovering from the shock occasioned by his sudden entrance, Verelst, while Osalez gave his hand to young Annesley (who, dessed and desperate, was scarcely sensible to his mode of saluta-

tion), had snatched his hat and was preparing to quit the room.—But the unwelcome guest interposed ere he could reach the door.

"Hear me before you go!" said Osalez, in a firm voice. "I came hither for the express purpose of meeting you. The presence of a mutual friend was a fitter spot for our interview than that of a cold stranger, like the Marquis. It was not disinclination that kept me away from his house this morning."

It was now the turn of Verelst to exhibit composure.

"Had I been aware of your intentions," said he, coldly, "I would certainly have deferred my visit to Mr. Annesley till a future moment."

"You *could* not!" was the cool reply of Osalez. "It would have been impossible for you to sleep this night, with a sum of money in your possession which you knew to be the property of yonder boy. I know ye both! The same hot-headed enthusiasm that prompted *him* to pledge his name, his peace of mind, his narrow income, to a Money-lender, in order to obtain the means of obliging you, would render it impossible to you to close your eyes, while unnecessarily remaining his debtor."

"I have, I find, to thank you for the means of repaying him," observed Verelst, somewhat softened—"For *that* favour, accept my acknowledgments. But it does not, it cannot efface from my recollection your long neglect and unkindness towards the most deserving of women. Farewell!—Against you we cherish no resentment; but there can be neither love nor amity between thine and mine."

"Thine *are* mine!" replied Abednego, neither abashed nor dismayed by these bitter reproaches. "Resist as we may the dictates of nature, the ocean can no more dissever from its waves an offending drop, than your wife and children expel from their veins the blood that is kindred with my own."

"Neither are we the first of those so conjoined by nature," interrupted Verelst, "who have converted kindred blood to drops of gall!—Again I say, therefore, accept my thanks and my farewell. Between persons so closely united, it must be peace or war. With others there might exist a medium of lukewarm good-will. With us there must be love or hatred."

"I want no medium," said Osalez, still preventing his departure, and with such steadiness that Basil Annesley, deeply interested in the discussion, was driven to despair by the sturdy perseverance of Verelst. "There must be love between us,—there must be peace. —Never too late for peace. Your friend here will tell you," he continued, glancing towards Basil, "that I have recently wrestled, face to face, with Death. At such a moment, the truths to which, in health and amid the contentions and struggles of life, we close our ears and eyes, speak trumpet-tongued to the Soul, and reveal their dread decree in characters as legible as those manifested to King Belshazzar. I have sinned against you, Verelst—I have suffered vindictive feelings and resentment of a single injury, to efface from my bosom those hallowed ties of affection vouchsafed by the Almighty for the solace of human life. I have allowed your officious interposition in my affairs to steel my heart against

the sufferings of a once-loved sister and the children she has borne you. In this have I greatly offended; and therefore in all Christian humility, acknowledge my fault and entreat the favour of your forgiveness."

Utterly thrown off his guard by this singular self-abasement on the part of the haughty Abednego, Verelst was so far softened as to hesitate.

But a moment's consideration brought before him anew the years of suffering and privation endured by his excellent wife and lovely children; and again, he hardened his heart, and put forth no answering token to the extended hand of Osalez.

"You have my full forgiveness," said he. "Friendship is not a thing to start into life spontaneously, on the slight demand of a converted enemy. The wrongs of my family forbid me to say more: the sense of what is due to your tardy repentance to concede less."

Once more, the agitated artist made a movement to depart. But Basil Annesley now interposed.

"My dear Verelst," cried he, "it is you who are now exhibiting a vindictive spirit. How—how can you allow yourself to torture a nature so cordial, in order to assume feelings of animosity, which, even if they existed, should be disarmed by the frank and fervent manner in which the olive-branch is extended to you!"

"If you only knew, my dear young friend," cried the painter, "what a series——"

"I know, and seek to know, nothing on the subject of your quarrel," hastily interrupted Basil. "But *this* I know,—that half the quarrels and half the resentments of this world, arise from misunderstandings which a few reasonable words would clear up."

"In this case all is perfectly understood," replied the artist, coldly; "nor are we children to obey the impulses of momentary passion. Both have brooded upon our wrongs, till mutual hatred has been engendered."

"If engendered,—on one side, it has been bitterly atoned,—on the other, bitterly repented," rejoined Osalez, with tears in his eyes.

"My dear Verelst!" cried Basil Annesley, deeply moved by witnessing such profound emotion on the part of men of advanced years,—"half an hour ago, you were pleased to express towards me feelings of gratitude and regard. If I have ever served you, and you wished to mark your sense of obligation, I beseech you do it at once, and efface all trace for ever, by accepting the hand which I see trembling with eagerness to clasp your own!" At this appeal, Verelst, for the first time, turned his eyes full upon his brother-in-law! and either the traces of time and care perceptible in his broken frame and withered countenance, or the manifestation of emotions which Abednego was at no pains to conceal, softened the obduracy of the indignant husband; for, on finding the hand of Osalez placed in his, a moment afterwards, by Basil Annesley, he no longer persisted in rejection. In a moment, both gave a loose to the long-resisted promptings of nature; and the "iron tears of Pluto's cheek" were emulated in those that fell profusely from beneath the shaggy eyebrows of A. O.

Basil was about to retire to the adjoining room, leaving the brothers to a more copious mutual explanation. But Osalez prevented him. "Nay," said he, "you are as if of our own flesh. Tarry and hear all.—I have no secrets—I wish to have none from you."

Amid all his struggles of feeling, Basil could scarcely refrain from a smile. To hear A. O. boasting of having no secrets from him;—A. O., whose whole life was a mystery—whose right hand knew not the doings of the left; A. O., who concentrated in his own person half-a-dozen separate existences, and unaccordant fortunes!

"I would fain have taken steps towards this reconciliation many months ago, from the moment of my first acquaintance with this improvident boy, your friend Annesley," resumed Osalez; when at length confidentially seated beside Verelst on the sofa (having resumed his own self-possession long before the simple artist had ceased to sob like a child), "but that I did not choose to approach as a benefactor the man I wished to conciliate as a brother. I wished you to be independent in circumstances,—rich through your own talents and endowments,—before I addressed myself to you with overtures of good-will, of which the necessities of your family might seem to compel your acceptance. We have now met upon equal ground; and you have granted me your forgiveness, as a Christian and a kinsman, without forfeiting your self-respect. All is as it should be. I have taken every precaution to spare your pride as well as promote my interest in your affection. And now, tell me—when will you propose a visit from me to my sister? In her infirm condition, we must beware of producing agitation, more especially on the eve of a long journey; if, indeed, after our mutual explanations, you persist in fulfilling your engagements to the Marquis."

"I will speak to Rachael this very night," replied Verelst; "but it will require time to prepare her for so trying an interview. Years of hardship have so altered my poor wife, that the greatest precaution is indispensable. She is so changed that you will not know her."

"I have been many times in her presence within these last few months," said Osalez, with a smile.

"You are mistaken,—wholly mistaken!" eagerly rejoined the artist. "She never quits the house. Ask Mr. Annesley.—She never leaves even her own room!"

"It was *there* our interview took place," calmly rejoined Abednego.

"Mistaken,—mistaken!" persisted Verelst, with a smile,—gently shaking his head. "I promise you that you would not know poor Rachael were you to meet."

"She is far less changed, however, than myself," replied Osalez; "since, when we *did* meet, I recognised her perfectly; while *she* addressed me as a stranger. Do you remember the person who fetched from your rooms the two battle-pieces sold by the scoundrel Stubbs to the Duke of Rochester?"

Verelst paused a moment, for consideration.

"Perfectly," said he at length. "But *that* was an old Jew."

"It was myself!"

The artist replied by an incredulous smile.

"Do you recollect that, when you received the three five-pound notes for which you had sold the pictures, or rather in consideration of which you had been robbed of them by the knavish dealer,—you bad him inform Mr. Stubbs that the original design of the Battle of the Standard was still in your hands, having withdrawn it from your series of military sketches, at the suggestion of a dear friend?"

"Which *dear* friend was, I trust, myself," gaily interrupted Basil.

"But *you* were not,—you *cannot* have been that filthy old Jew!" cried the artist, in utter amazement.

"You have seen me more than once in disguises equally unseemly," replied Osalez, undisturbed.—"For years past, I have placed a great gulf betwixt myself and what is called the world; and when once we hazard so bold a step as to fling off the bond of fellowship with our brethren, we require the creation of prodigious interests, and excitements indeed strong, to fill up the vacuum! I have been at war with mankind, as long as they were previously my enemies. Out of my sixty years, for thirty did I support their injustice; and, during the last thirty, I have revenged myself. But he who fights single-handed against society, must multiply the guises under which he wields his weapons; and shrink from no means or measures by which to strengthen his cause. For such explanations, however, we shall find a time hereafter. Enough that you promise me to prepare my poor dear sister to receive me. Basil Annesley will apprize me of your success;—or, better still, conduct you to my abode. The way to yours I learnt from *him*;—few people, I suspect, are better acquainted with it."

The young soldier coloured deeply at this allusion.

"I was not aware," said he, "of having mentioned to you the address of Mr. Verelst."

"It is from your pictures, which I found in the hands of Stubbs and others," replied Abednego, addressing Verelst, rather than replying to his host, "that I became aware of your being a resident in this country. But you may imagine with what care and canning these knaves guarded the secret, so long as you remained a dupe in their grasping hands."

"And it was my good friend Mr. Annesley, then, who did me this further service," exclaimed the painter, warmly.

"Indirectly.—I was anxious to know the object of a certain levy of money which he effected through my means; and since, whether as Osalez the Crœsus, or as A. O. the Money-lender, I have the means of investigating and comparing all the secrets of the two money markets (the great and the small), I had no difficulty in discovering that the acceptances he had to meet were in favour of one Gerard Verelst, a painter living near South Audley-street. The rest was readily ascertained,—the miniature I presented to him affords sufficient proof how soon and how thoroughly I made myself master of the secrets of the family."

Basil Annesley gasped for breath. There was no guessing where the indiscreet revelations of Abednego might stop.

"And now," said he, regardless of the embarrassment he had created, "I must wish you good night. Though I have found time to say much that may have appeared to one or both of you superfluous, I am in the greatest haste and some anxiety. I have business to transact before midnight that dearly concerns the happiness of a family whose ruin,—whatever I may do to avert the fatal crash,—will, ere long, produce nearly as much sensation in that Bedlam called the *beau monde*, as that of the Duke of Rochester. I should leave these Maitlands, in fact, to the consequences of their folly, but that one of the girls has managed to soften my old heart by the eager interest she takes in the fortunes of a certain brother-officer of her brother, named Basil Annesley."

"Is all up, then, with Lord Maitland?" demanded Basil, in a tone of regret, without noticing his allusion.

"His bills have been hawking about the town for this year past," replied A. O., with one of his former sarcastic smiles. "Her ladyship is at Almack's; while her signature is in the hands of the Jews."

After a few more bitter allusions to the improvidence of the family, he was gone; nor did Basil much regret that Verelst, in his eagerness to communicate to his family the singular reconciliation which had taken place, instantly followed. When the artist had taken his departure, his young friend picked up from the floor the three hundred-pound notes which, amid the varied interests of the foregoing conversation, had fallen unnoticed to the ground.

"Would any one imagine," thought he, with a mournful smile, as he placed them in his desk, "how short a time has elapsed since the possession of these notes appeared to me a matter of life and death! And would not any one believe that, instead of the beggarly fellow that I am, I possessed the wealth of the Indies, or of Abednego Osalez. But, alas! what further care have I for money? Verelst is now prosperous; Esther lost to me for ever. As to my poor mother, though straitened in means, her pride is so much greater than her poverty, that I am convinced she prefers dispensing with the luxuries of life, to being indebted for them to any mortal living, even to her son."

By degrees, as he began to recover the cruel shock, arising from the discovery that the object of his affections was nearly akin to the infamous A. O., and affianced to another, Basil was forced to admit to himself, that the former circumstance was of a nature to reconcile him to the latter.

Never would his haughty mother have consented to his pledging his faith to the niece of the Money-lender. Abednego, if not a Jew, could not be many generations removed from Hebraism: and Basil was only too painfully aware of her rooted antipathy to anything even remotely connected with the Jewish nation.

As this aversion now recurred with redoubled energy to his mind, he also recalled with surprise the half-forgotten fact of her being in possession of a book of a peculiar nature, which Verelst stated to have been the property of his wife's father and brother.

By what possible concatenation of events was this to be accounted for? Through what fortuitous chain of incidents could the daughter of Lord L——, and widow of Sir Bernard Annesley, have been brought into connexion with the family of A. O.?

Summer was at hand; and he resolved to make the inviting nature of the weather a pretext for a short visit to Barlingham. The discussions which had arisen between him and Lady Annesley would afford ground for such interrogations, as could not fail to throw light upon the mystery. It was time that all relating to Abednego Osalez should be cleared up. He would no longer be silenced like a child. He was resolved to confront the utmost indignation and harshness on the part of the rigid recluse, rather than remain a martyr to the mysteries by which he was encompassed. The more he had achieved towards fathoming their darkness, the more he seemed involved in new perplexities.

It was, however, an inexpressible comfort to Basil, that his confidence in his old friend was in process of restoration. To find him openly avowing his disguises, and glorying in his eccentricity, was far more satisfactory than to fancy him the confederate of knaves and impostors; and even the certainty of his obdurate estrangement from a sister so worthy as Mrs. Verelst, was nothing in comparison with the pain of supposing him in league with Stubbs the picture-dealer, in a double imposition upon the Duke of Rochester and the unfortunate Verelst.

The first person who accosted Basil Annesley on the following day, as he was about to enter his club, was John Maitland; who, instead of the nod that usually passed between them, surprised him by a sudden and fervent grasp of the hand.

"Come a little way down St. James's-street with me, Nan," said he, hooking his arm into that of Basil, and proceeding with him leisurely towards Brookes's. "You are a good fellow," he resumed, as soon as they were out of hearing of Wilberton, and one or two others who were clustered round the door. "Believe me, I feel the full force of our obligations."

"*What* obligations?" demanded the astonished Basil.

"Oh! you need not affect ignorance. No occasion to be afraid now of my pleasantries on the subject of A. O. I am as fully aware as you can desire that *such* 'a friend in need is a friend indeed.' Yesterday afternoon, my dear fellow, my prognostications were fulfilled. There was an execution in our house. A pleasant thing, eh, for her ladyship and the girls, to see bailiffs sitting in the hall!" he continued, with a swelling bosom. "However, it is partly their own fault, if that be any comfort. All the blame was not on my father's side, though they choose to place it there."

"I am heartily sorry—sincerely sorry," Basil was beginning.

"Come, come, don't talk so like the Dowager-Colonel!" cried John Maitland; "Carr was heartily sorry—sincerely sorry; but, hang it, *you* were better than sorry."

"What was I, then?" inquired Basil, shrugging his shoulders at the levity of his friend; "for, upon my soul, I have not the least idea!"

"Of course not,—because *you*, forsooth, have not the slightest

acquaintance with A. O.! It was not *you* who interceded in behalf of my family. It was not your liking for Lucy, (who, by the way, is half out of her wits with thankfulness,) which induced you to determine the man whom you will not own as friend or acquaintance; but over whom you have all the influence of a master over a slave, or a Czar of Muscovy over a Colonel of Hulans, to come forward once more to my father's relief—discharge the writ—and (on condition of his letting the house in Arlington-street, and retiring to Maitland-park), re-establish the family affairs? Oh, no! it was not by any means *you* who did us this excellent service!"

"As I live and breathe—*no!*" cried Basil Annesley, with such earnestness as to cause his companion to stop short for a moment. "Had I the power, indeed, I would have done as much, or twice as much for a friend. But I have not a guinea in the world."

"My dear Nan, it is too late to recommence this flummery!" cried Maitland, almost angry at his seeming mistrust. "This man (I beg his pardon, this gentleman,—for a gentleman, God knows, he has shown himself to *us!*) owned to me, in so many words, that he was acting at your instigation; or, more correctly speaking, with a view of affording you pleasure."

"He *has* afforded me sincere pleasure by his liberality," rejoined Basil. "But he must have divined my wishes by preternatural means, for I swear I never expressed them; nor, on my word of honour as a gentleman, have I any claims upon him that could justify my attempting to influence his conduct in the smallest particular."

John Maitland replied by another incredulous smile. But they had now returned to the club door.

"Not a word of all this before the others!" was the parting injunction of John Maitland; a warning altogether superfluous, for nothing would have induced Basil to advert, in presence of his brother officers, to any subject even remotely involving mention of the name of A. O.

Before night, Basil had managed to obtain a week's leave of absence, with the view of accomplishing his visit to Barlingham; and despatched a letter to his mother entreating her sanction to his journey. The delay occasioned by waiting for her reply would, however, necessarily detain him two days in town; a circumstance he would gladly have avoided,—dreading that the renewal of his intimacy with the artist's family, and their reconcilement with Abednego, might throw him once more into their society, and compel him to become a witness of the mutual affection and happiness of the Duke of San Catalda and Esther Verelst.

On the morrow, however, he was to be on guard, which, for four-and-twenty hours at least, would secure him from contact with any member of the family.

The weather was now as fine as London weather ever pretends to be;—for even the height of summer is scarcely so enjoyable in the metropolis as those delicious days of opening May, before the young leaves have found out into what a world of soot and smoke they have budded, but bear their verdure in purity and freshness, like the bright and unsullied countenance of a child. The skies

were blue,—the leaves green,—the sparrows chirping gaily in park and square, as if making the most of their time, ere London was covered once more with dust and ashes. At such a season, it is difficult for the buoyant heart of two-and-twenty to sink under the pressure of care. At the instigation of its own pulses, it hopes when hope there is none,—it loves, when prospect of happiness there is none! The spring-tide of life swells wildly and irrisistibly within its bosom. No!—despair is indeed difficult for the young.

Basil usually disliked being on guard; from the mere restraint of being tied to time and place, getting up earlier than usual, and being restricted for the day to such pastimes as a lounge in the British Institution. Unaffected and unpretending, he had no taste for parading himself and his uniform in St. James's-street, an appetite that rarely extends beyond the first fortnight of escape from cubhood to clubhood; during which, a young guardsman is privileged to astonish the waiting-women at Grange's with the splendour of his scarlet and gold.

But, on the day in question, howbeit the evening before he had congratulated himself on the certainty thus afforded of escape from the visits of Osalez or Verelst, no sooner was he established at St. James's, than he became insupportably irritated by his enthralment. He discovered that it was essential to go and pay a visit of ceremony to the Branzinis, before Esther was installed in their household. He found out that, in the family distresses of the Maitlands, he should be inexcusable if he failed in respect of leaving a card at their door. In point of fact, he wanted only to be free. In the restlessness of his discontent he fumed and fretted to be master of his own actions. Had he not been on guard, Basil would probably have ridden off into the country; devised business at Richmond, or sulked to his solitary whitebait at the Crown and Sceptre;—and when there—have suddenly become equally fidgety to return to London.

He was, in fact, burning with desire to know all that was passing under the roof of the artist. For the first time, the brother officers on guard with him found him absent and unsociable. Colonel Loftus (John Maitland being absent) had ventured to banter him upon his flirtation with Lucy; and the pain which her manifest partiality was supposed to cause to their friend Blencowe. But the fractiousness of Basil's replies soon convinced them that he was in no mood to be trifled with. They saw that he was thoroughly out of temper; nor was it till they had watched him fling away two or three successive cigars as they all stood smoking together on the steps after dinner, that they attributed his fastidiousness to the right cause;—the irritation of a man crossed in love, and whom everything and everybody else consequently crosses. For if the course of true love never runs smooth, it seldom fails to render us equally stumbling-blocks in the paths of other people.

The first thing intimated to Basil on reaching his lodgings, after coming off guard the following morning, was, that Mr. Osalez had called upon him once or twice in the course of the preceding day, manifesting great anxiety to see him.

"And why did you not tell him I was on guard?" demanded young Annesley, to whom it appeared as easy a matter to pay a visit at St. James's as at his private residence.

"I did, sir; but the gentleman seemed put out, and muttered something about 'puppies' and 'coxcombs,' which made me think it unlikely he would drive further," replied the prim Mr. Smith.

"He was in his carriage then?" inquired Basil.

"He was, sir."

"And alone?"

"No, sir. There was another old gentleman with him, whom I could not rightly see. But both of them seemed much disappointed at not finding you."

After receiving this intelligence, Basil, while dressing and breakfasting, resolved to proceed immediately to the house of Osalez. Something regarding the interests of Verelst might be in agitation, in which his assistance was needful. But to which among the many residences of his Protean friend was he now to address himself?

"As he called in his carriage," mused the young guardsman, "he came, I conclude, in the character of Osalez the financier; and I will, therefore, hasten to Bernard-street."

Having mounted his hack, he proceeded thither in haste. But at the door he received from the now obsequious butler, who delighted to honour all whom his master delighted to welcome at his dinner-table, the information that might have been anticipated: "Mr. Osalez had been off to the City these two hours."

"And where am I to find him in the City?" demanded young Annesley,—a query that appeared to excite as much amazement in the rotund pantler as though he had demanded in what quarter of the town he was to look for Westminster Abbey.

"Mr. Osalez, sir, will be in the Stock Exchange," said he, conceiving that the handsome young gentleman, differing so widely from the usual visitants of that house, must be infirm of intellect. "If off 'Change, you will find him at his house of business."

"And where is *that?*" incautiously inquired Basil.

The man seemed to draw largely upon the decorum of his calling in order to refrain from a laugh.

"In the Old Jewry, sir. But you need only mention the name of Mr. Osalez in the City, sir, for any one to show you the way. The first cabman or orange-boy you meet will inform you."

To the City, Basil now hurried, where the stunning rumble of Cheapside, and the perpetual motion involving so much of the *utile* and so little of the *dulce* of life, served to excite his wonder how the less practical part of business—the portion requiring the aid of figures and calculations—could ever be carried on in the midst of such a hubbub.

On turning, however, into the narrow lane suggested to him, at his first inquiry, as containing the house of business of Osalez and Co., he perceived that even the City has its quiet situations and "no thoroughfares," like the aristocratic Park-places and St. James's-places adjoining the parks of the West End.

The narrow, dirty, dingy lane was apparently occupied by the

warehouses of wholesale trade; for, just as every house of mark in St. James's had formerly its iron extinguisher beside the door, to put out the flambeaux of the footmen, every doorway had, in token of distinction, its ponderous iron crane, while the lower windows of the houses were closely boarded. On every door-post was inscribed one or more names, as unaristocratic as "Jacob Grimms and nephew," "Fiskin, brothers," "Dando and Company," without further indication of their calling; *such* names constituting the unostentatious thews and sinews of commercial life; and though little or no traffic was going on at that hour in the street, it is probable that a larger amount of capital passed through every one of those shabby doorways in the course of a week than into any mansion in St. James's-square in the period of a year.

Halfway down the lane, however, was an opening into a small court, which, by calculation, appeared to contain the number indicated to Basil; and having accordingly dismounted and given his horse in charge to a steady-looking old man, who put himself forward for the charge, Basil proceeded through the gorge of a narrow court into a larger one, surrounded by high buildings, one side of which seemed occupied by a handsome old-fashioned dwelling-house, and the other by a range of buildings, the basement story of which was appropriated to counting-houses. Of this portion of the mansion, the huge swing-doors seemed in continual vibration to admit or emit a perpetual string of human beings—the sort of careworn, sallow-cheeked people who walk with their coats closely buttoned over their pockets, and their blank visages indicating a mind wandering at many miles' distance, whom one recognises at first sight as the children of the tribe of Mammon.

Unnoticed,—for such people proceed straight to their place of rendezvous, without a vacant thought to bestow on auguries of the flight of crows or sight of strange faces,—Basil pushed his way through the swing-doors among the rest; and, after passing a second swing-door, found himself in a vast sky-lighted chamber, containing by way of furniture, a large timepiece against the wall, three long ranges of wooden counters, forty wooden stools, and forty wooden clerks seated calculating thereupon; each with his parchment-bound ledger before him, each with the multiplication-table engraved on his soul in characters effacing even those of the tables of the law.

In the centre of the hall, was a single mahogany desk and stool, somewhat loftier than the rest, apparently destined to the use of the high-priest of the temple of Mammon. But it was vacant. Clerks were bustling backwards and forwards, with cheque-books, or pocket-books, or printed papers in their hands; apparently as mechanical in operations involving the disposal of millions, as the timepiece against the wall in admeasurement of the still more valuable currency assigned to its computation.

A buzz of whispers, never rising into unbusiness-like tumult, seemed to form a portion of the heated and unsavoury atmosphere of the place; the money shovelled backwards and forwards across

the grated pay-counter, being of no more account in the eyes of the individuals occupied in promoting its circulation, than barley-sugar in those of the confectioner's boy to whom prohibition has ceased to be irksome.

As usual, when in chase of his extraordinary friend, Basil Annesley found himself among a race of persons with whom he had neither an emotion nor an impulse in common; and after being pushed against, and shuffled aside for a minute or two, by individuals having business to transact, and as careless in their outward man as is usually the case with those who have anything to do in the world, he inquired for Mr. Osalez.

The clerk to whom he applied, pointed to the vacant chair, as much as to say, "Can't you use your eyes and perceive that he is absent?" when Basil, perceiving that his informant was young and beardless, a stripling like himself, moved a few steps towards the swing-doors, and again addressed the inquiry to a grave-looking, middle-aged man, with a bald head, seedy coat, and mourning ring on his little finger;—who was wasting his time in mending his pen, and had the appearance among his brother clerks, of a heavy coach running against the mails.

On finding himself civilly accosted by a well-dressed stranger, the elderly clerk slipped from beneath the counter, and desiring Basil to follow him, led the way to the extremity of the hall, towards a room divided from it only by a glazed compartment, shaded with green curtains; but containing only another desk with an old silver standish and writing implements, and half-a-dozen horsehair chairs.

"I beg your pardon, sir," apologized the dull old clerk, "I fancied Mr. Osalez was here. He must have just stepped out. He will be back at two. He is always here as the clock strikes two. Perhaps you will return, or at least favour me by writing your name for him?"

Basil declined doing either. He felt that he had committed a blunder in following Osalez. He found himself as little at home in that vast establishment, as at the bottom of a gold-mine. The place was as ill adapted to the confidences he was expecting as the little noisy chamber containing the clock-works of St. Paul's!

Angry with himself and the clerk for the time he had wasted, he muttered something about calling again; and bustled his way back again through the hall, (where his transit was as little noted as that of one of the motes dancing in the slanting sunbeams straggling through the skylight as if in search of some living being on which to confer enjoyment), towards the paved space adjoining the old mansion house, and ruralized by the name of garden, because containing a pump and an old sycamore with about as much sap in the trunk as there exists in the copper tree forming part of the Chatsworth *jets d'eau*.

Having once more reached the street, Basil was about to remount his horse, the rein of which was offered him with one hand by the old man, while holding out the other for the expected remuneration; when, as he was groping in his pocket for a sixpence, instead of the shilling he would probably have given had his visit been less

infructuous, the man whispered in a tone of mysterious confidence, —"Vy for you sheek him here, ma tear?" and lo, after a start of surprise, young Annesley recognised in the individual by whom he was addressed, the fellow who, both in Delahay-street and at Rochester House, had already marked his respectful recognition of the protégé of A. O.

"*Where* should I seek Mr. Osalez, unless at his house of business?" demanded Basil, angrily.

"He hash more houshesh of bushinesh than van, two, or dree," replied the familiar of Abednego's inquisition.

"Take me to the one where I am most likely to find him, then, and it shall be worth your while," observed Basil Annesley.

The old man, who had been stooping in scornful examination of the minute coin bestowed on him by Annesley, now peered up into his face with a cunning glance, that not even the disappearance of his rusty beard could disguise from being that of the old Jew; and with only a familiar nod of the head by way of signal of acquiescence and intelligence, took the head of Basil's horse and preceded him through a tortuous complexity of dirty lanes, in which the stagnant atmosphere seemed imprisoned as in the cell of a felon.

At the close of a ten-minutes' walk, he paused in a small shabby street, which, from the unequal form of the buildings, seemed to constitute the rear or outlet of one of greater magnitude; and, taking a key from his pocket, opened a mean-looking green door, to which neither knocker nor bell-handle was attached; then, stepping back stealthily to Basil, resumed the rein of his horse.

"Do you suppose that I am going to run my head into earth so uninviting as *that*?" cried young Annesley, warmly. "How do I know into what den of thieves you may be decoying me?"

"Tievsh if ye shoose!" said the Jew, no whit offended. "But the pashage before you, ma tear, leadsh shtraight where you would find A. O.—*Datsh* all!"

Reassured by his previous knowledge of the old fellow's connexion with Abednego, Basil determined to dare the adventure. Single-handed, he knew himself to be a match for most men; and his strange conductor would scarcely venture to allure into any dangerous resort an officer of the guards, for whom active search would be made in case of disappearance, and who would easily be traced, through the house of business of Osalez, to the suspicious spot. Nevertheless, the entrance to the narrow passage was grim and repellent enough to daunt a bolder adventurer.

Once across the threshold, he was rather excited than otherwise, by the mysterious aspect of the spot. But scarcely had he groped a few steps along the dark stone corridor, when the door was clapped to behind him; and he found himself alone in the stone passage, which received light only through small gratings inserted in the doors at either end, as if for the purpose of ventilation.

Since it was as easy to attempt further progress as to return, Basil pushed his way forwards; and on approaching the door at the end, perceived that near it, the passage widened, so as to form a recess containing a wooden bench; while through the grating, hich was on an exact level with his face, voices in eager dis-

putation reached him from within. One of them, at least, was familiar to him. One of them was that of A. O. The other was a woman's.

On applying his hand to find a latch or opening, he found to his surprise that what he had conceived to be a door, was simply a portion of the passage,—the wooden bench being continued across; and after a moment's reflection, the nature of the apartment within, and of the conversation which he could not forbear overhearing, convinced him that he was simply installed in some hiding-place or observatory,—some Dionysius's ear,—from which the Money-lender was in the habit of exercising his unholy inquisition over his victims, previous to a closer encounter.

To interrupt such a conversation as was passing in the chamber beyond, with the admission of having been an eavesdropper, would convey mortification to one party, vexation to the other; and Basil felt consequently privileged to abide the result of the interview.

The fragment of discourse that now reached his ears, however it might disgust, afforded him no new insight into the character or conduct of the lady upon whom he was thus forced to play the spy,—being no other than the young Countess of Winterfield.

All he had formerly heard to her disadvantage from Abednego, naturally recurred to his mind; and he was consequently less surprised at the tone of harshness and air of contempt assumed towards her by the Money-lender.

For it was no longer the well-dressed, well-mannered Osalez who stood before him. There was nothing to recal the distinguished financier,—the enlightened patron of the Arts. It was the hard, cautious, calculating old usurer of Soho who occupied a plain arm-chair; opposite to the sofa whereon, arrayed in all the elegance of fashion, alternately smiling and weeping, exercising her coquetry as a beauty, and pathos as a petitioner, sat the unhappy woman, who evidently trusted to the effect of her mingled charms and eloquence, to soften the obdurate heart of A. O.

CHAPTER XVII.

So light is vanity!—SHAKSPEARE.

"BUT when I tell you," cried the inconsiderate Lady Winterfield, as Basil drew near (little suspecting that a third person was within reach, to note the artifices by which she was attempting to recommend herself to the hard heart of the Money-lender), "when I tell you that this is the last time I will ever trouble you with an application?——"

"You have told me the same thing, madam, these half-a-dozen last times!" replied, in his coldest and most deliberate voice, the imperturbable Abednego. "I had the honour of assuring you, during the hurried visit you made to town from Brighton, before Christmas, that it would be totally out of my power to accommodate you further. My advances already exceed the value of the jewels deposited."

"Nonsense! Don't I know the sum of money they cost Lord Winterfield, on our marriage, only five years ago? I have still by me the jeweller's bills, which I can show you."

"Can you also show me the jeweller's conscience?" retorted Abednego. "Such articles are invariably sold at two-thirds beyond their intrinsic value. To convince you, madam, of this, so far from making you a further loan, I am most anxious to replace the diamonds in your keeping, on receiving back, with interest, the amount advanced on such security."

"You say this," cried Lady Winterfield, pettishly, "only because you know that it is utterly out of my power to return it. You are aware that nothing but extreme necessity ever compelled me to place the jewels in your hand; and now, you insult me by wishing to recal a loan you are aware that I cannot repay. How do you suppose, pray, that I am to obtain such a sum of money?"

"*That* is your ladyship's affair. When, by tears and entreaties, you extorted it from me, you assured me that your embarrassments were temporary, and that you would very shortly be able to clear yourself."

"Yes, of course. I said all that is usually said to Money-lenders.——"

"All that may be usually said to Money-lenders by fashionable Countesses in distress. But I can assure your ladyship, strange as you may think it, that there *are* persons in the world who hold sacred the redemption of their honest word, even when pledged to a Money-lender. With respect to the extreme necessity you urge as a plea for placing in my hands your family jewels, I must be permitted to say that I have seen your ladyship's establishment, that I have been allowed the honour of entering your ladyship's drawing-room; very different, I admit, from my own," continued A. O., glancing round the cold, wainscoted, unfurnished room, the boards of which were covered with a square of discoloured Scotch carpet, "but equally far from inspiring me with compassion for the destitution of the owner!"

"We are bound, in this world, to keep up the decencies of life due to our position in society," interrupted the Countess, in a haughty tone.

"I thoroughly agree with your ladyship," was the fearless reply of Abednego, "and for that very reason I have it at heart to see the valuables of the Countess of Winterfield removed from the custody of the Money-lending Jew."

His lovely visitor blushed to the temples at this unexpected retort, but more in anger than in sorrow.

"A step lower in the scale of degradation," calmly resumed Abednego, "and they would appear among the unredeemed pledges in a pawnbroker's window. Think of the brilliant Countess of Winterfield presenting herself at Court with duplicates in her pocket."

"You presume upon my necessities to insult me thus!" cried the indignant woman, roused by this terrible sentence.

"Necessities, madam, permit me to observe, wholly of your own creation. I am not unfrequently compelled to witness the woes of my fellow-creatures,—ay, even those of your own sex. But how

different is their nature from those of which you complain! Trust me, there are severer pangs in the world than arise from the rumpling of the rose-leaf. I have seen mothers of families struggling for their children's bread,—I have seen devoted wives beggared by the improvidence of their husbands, yet exerting themselves diligently, humbly, and silently, to extricate themselves from ruin. Such misfortunes, madam, and such penury, I respect. Nay, I have known well-born women subject themselves to wretchedness and privation, for the sake of their lovers,—and even *those* I have respected. But I have neither respect nor pity for the wantonness of waste that purports only the entanglement of frivolous admirers. The display intended to deceive some unhappy dupe into offering you his hand, moves only my contempt. If you must needs have an opera-box, for the young Marquis to sit beside you throughout the evening as throughout the morning, if you must needs have a succession of showy dresses, to enhance your beauty to secure these danglers, if you must needs have brilliant equipages to fly about the town, and wander from races to breakfasts, from Greenwich parties to pic-nics at Ken Wood, (your ladyship perceives that I am tolerably well versed in your movements!)—have them at other cost than mine.—I have no money to throw away on the maintenance of your follies."

Lady Winterfield started up. Galled beyond endurance by the humiliations thus inflicted upon her, she resolved to obey the harsh injunction of Abednego, and seek assistance elsewhere. But, alas! a moment's reflection served to remind her that she had already sought it, and in vain; that she had no resource—no hope—save in the insolent rebuker of her faults. She submitted, therefore, rendered docile by the iron pressure of necessity. In a moment, she subdued her temper, and humbled her pride,—reduced to tameness, like the beasts of the field, by the pangs of privation.

"You are most severe upon me," said she, in the pretty coaxing voice that none knew better how to assume when her purpose needed, "though perhaps not more so than I deserve. But when I assure you that, if you persist in refusing me this five hundred pounds, I am utterly ruined—ruined both in fortune and reputation——"

"My refusal will not render your ladyship a shilling poorer than you are now. In what way, therefore, can you charge me with your ruin?"

"You will have, at least, exposed it to the world."

Abednego shrugged his shoulders. "You expose yourself, madam," said he, "by using such arguments. Once for all, I repeat that you are wasting the substance of others, and of your children, merely to keep up false appearances in the world. So long as you enjoy luxuries which you do not and cannot pay for, you are shining at the cost of your coachmakers, jewellers, milliners, money-lenders,—the abject obligee of humble tradesmen. At this moment—woman and Countess as you are—you stand before me as an inferior. Though you may be a Countess of the realm, and I the vilified A. O., I rise above you as a capitalist, I rise above you as a moralist, in whose hands you have placed weapons of offence."

It was now the turn of Lady Winterfield to shrug her shoulders; but with impatience, rather than contempt.

"Last week," resumed Abednego, careless of the variations of her countenance, "there came hither a woman young and lovely as yourself, who like yourself had exceeded her means and broken her engagements. She came hither to me, not like your ladyship, hoping to move me to pity by the sight of her loveliness and her affected despair. She had other arms for the combat; and those arms, madam, prevailed. To *her* I assigned thrice the sum of her original debt, and at my own instigation."

"And of what nature were those arms?" demanded Lady Winterfield, colouring deeply, and, by casting down her eyes, showing that she was prepared for expressions of gallantry and admiration on the part of one whom she loathed as a harpy.

"It avails little to explain," replied Abednego, with an ill-repressed smile of exultation, as he rose from his chair and approached her: and the blood of Basil Annesley boiled in his veins, and he pressed his knee closer upon the wooden bench, while inclining his eyes towards the grated aperture, "for they are such as it were, perhaps, unbecoming so great a lady as the Countess of Winterfield to put to profit."

"I am willing to use any arms—make any concession," faltered the fair bankrupt, a deadly paleness succeeding to her previous flush, as she contemplated the growing audacity of the Money-lender.

Abednego folded his meagre hands carelessly before him, and, throwing back his head, stood contemplating her from head to foot, with a smile of indescribable expression. It was impossible to behold a more lovely woman; and the Money-lender gazed upon her as if making an appraisement of her charms.

"The arms to which *I* alluded are not at your ladyship's disposal," was at length his sarcastic reply. "For they were tears of genuine remorse for an involuntary breach of faith. They were the worn and haggard looks which labour and want impose upon the fairest face. She was a woman of the people, madam; like you, left young a widow; like you, with helpless children dependent upon her prudence. She told me—and her mien attested her veracity—that for them she had toiled day and night, for them abstained from food and rest. But the outlay that was to set her up in business, (borrowed of one of the agents of A. O., at usurious interest,) was still unrepaid. She was still poor, still insolvent, still needing indulgence, and came hither, like the fashionable Countess of Winterfield, to beg for mercy."

Greatly relieved, even while writhing under the severe lesson imparted by Abednego, the fashionable spendthrift gasped for breath.

"I granted it," resumed the harsh admonitor. "And I granted her also my respect, almost my affection. The old Money-lender soothed her as a father might have done, and sent her home in peace and comfort to her children. Yours, madam, will have less to thank you for. I will not expose you—I will not pursue you with the rigour of the law. But I choose to retain in security for

the property of mine which you have squandered, the diamonds pledged to me to that effect; ay, and without affording another guinea in extension of the loan—aware that neither that, nor millions, would impede your ruin and disgrace."

"Then I am lost!" cried Lady Winterfield, losing all self-possession, and unable to restrain her tears. "Those precious diamonds—"

"Those diamonds, madam, you do well to prize," resumed Abednego. "They were the bridal gift of one who bestowed his heart upon you, confiding in the promise of a fair exterior; who intrusted his honour to you, believing in the truth of your affections; who, on his dying-bed, bequeathed his children to your care, believing that all his love and confidence could not have been bestowed in vain. You do well, therefore, to prize the tokens of his love. But, trust me, they are safer in *my* keeping than in your own."

"But if I can obtain from some other person upon them," persisted the humbled woman, clasping her hands in intercession, while tears streamed wildly down her cheeks, "a sufficient amount to repay you what I have borrowed, with the additional sum needful to repair my shattered affairs?"

"You *cannot!*" interrupted Abednego; "I have weighed them to the uttermost carat, and the most liberal diamond merchant could not afford you in purchase within fifty pounds of the sum you have received from myself as a loan. Few better lapidaries in this town than myself."

"But if you would permit me to *try!*" persisted the lady, half-remonstrating, half-wheedling.

"No, madam," replied the Money-lender, with a significant smile. "You are not to be trusted with such valuable property. I could place those diamonds in the hands of the poor workwoman of whom I spake, with a far more sanguine hope of their safe return, than in those of the Right Honourable Countess of Winterfield."

At that moment there recurred to the mind of Basil Annesley a vision of this brilliant woman of fashion at the sale at Rochester House, laughing and talking amid a group of the most distinguished noblemen of the day, to whom her smiles conveyed rapture, and to whom her merest word was a law.

"Then nothing remains for me but *death!*" cried the distracted lady, throwing back from her face her silken ringlets, intermingled with the filmy drapery of Brussels lace, attached to her tiny French bonnet. "May you never live to repent, sir, the injury you have this day inflicted upon me and mine."

"People rarely give up the ghost a day the sooner for threats of self-destruction," replied the unimpassionable Abednego. "Your ladyship will, I trust, live long enough—long enough for retrenchment—long enough for repentance!"

"Remorseless man!" cried Lady Winterfield, even in the midst of her genuine tears, unable to renounce her habitual affectation. "Will *nothing* move your obdurate heart? Must I implore you on my bended knees?—Must I—"

"Spare yourself these exaggerations, madam," coolly interposed

Abednego. "I am too much used to listen to the pourings forth of human passion, not to decide in a moment what feelings are genuine, what assumed to move my compassion. Want, madam, possesses an iron key to the innermost recesses of the human heart, the recesses where eloquence lies glowing, like the lava within the volcano; and that key is often turned in my presence. The merchant trembling for his credit,—the soldier for his honour,—the husband for the peace of his fireside,—mothers who would screen the faults of their children,—children tortured by the necessities of their parents,—all these, madam, plead to me in turns, and often plead in vain. Judge, therefore, since I can resist the manly struggles of an upright man on the verge of bankruptcy,—of a wife agonized by the prospects of an honourable husband's imprisonment and shame,—whether I am likely to be touched by a few graceful attitudes arising from the extortions of a milliner's bill, or the claims of a compounder of fashionable cosmetics."

Lady Winterfield started up with an indignation of wounded pride, far more genuine than her attempts at pathos.

"I was a fool," cried she, "to expect from a money-lender the sentiments of a *man!* Do not, however, fancy that you will trample upon me with impunity. You may be compelled to restore those jewels by higher authority than mine. My lawyer assures me you are liable to prosecution for usurious practices against me. My lawyer assures me you are far more in my power than I in yours. Since you choose to declare war against me, take the consequences! I promise you that, with all your vulgar effrontery, you shall have the worst of it."

Abednego smiled sarcastically at this sudden transition from the fine lady to the virago.

"I am almost beginning to feel alarmed, madam," said he. "Suffer me to ring for your carriage. It will be a relief to my terrors, as well as to your emotions."

He rose from his seat as he spoke; and for a moment, Basil Annesley apprehended that, by one of those effects of legerdemain, of which he was now beginning to be ever in expectation when dealing with A. O., the host and his visitor might find it necessary to invade his retreat to secure egress from the house.

But it was not so. Scarcely had Abednego touched the bell lying on his bureau, when an opposite door was partially thrown open, by a brazen-fronted clerk (having a pen behind his ear, so admirably fitted to the locality that it seemed to have come with him into the world), who fixed his hard, light-coloured predial eye scrutinizingly on the lady, as though the habit of officiating for the Money-lender had endowed him with the power of reading in the faces of his clients the success or failure of their mission.

"See this lady to her carriage, Raffles," said Abednego, assuming his usual place at his bureau, with so determined an air of attention to business, as conveyed a sentence of dismissal. "Her ladyship is in haste."

Too proud to exhibit to a low subordinate, probably as impracticable as his employer, the misery gnawing at her heart, Lady Winterfield drew the Brussels lace closer round her face; and, by an

habitual impulse of affectation, lifting her silken pelisse from the ground, as if afraid of contact with the vulgar earth, quitted the room, escorted by her singular esquire; who, throwing open the folding doors, probably in derision, as if to give passage to some august personage, revealed to view beyond a handsome apartment richly hung with pictures.

It was evident, therefore, to Basil that he was ensconced in the unsuspected issue of some substantial residence. Remembering well the sudden apparition of the Money-lender as if emerging from a panel in the wall, when he himself first sought him as a client, he doubted not that some similar den had enabled Abednego to watch and surprise his actions. Indignant at the idea of this treachery, he was not sorry to have retaliated upon Osalez, by becoming an unsuspected witness of his privacy, before he gave him warning of his involuntary presence in the trap.

Scarcely had the door closed upon the Countess, when, flinging down the pen by which he had signified his decree of dismissal, he resumed his place in his arm-chair, throwing himself back into it with an expansion of self-indulgence, as if luxuriating in the idea of the torture he had been inflicting. Rubbing his withered hands with an air of exultation, a hearty laugh burst from his leathern cheeks, the hollowness of which thrilled to the marrow the frame of the warm-hearted young auditor.

"Dreadful!" was the shuddering response of Basil to the triumphant laugh of Abednego. But before he had time to pronounce his purposed warning of the presence of an intruder, the opposite door was again thrown open; and Annesley felt instantly revolted by the apprehension that the unfortunate victim of folly and frivolity might be returning for the fruitless renewal of her supplications. It was a relief to him when the bold-faced clerk entered alone.

"And what amount of bribe did the pretty fool offer you, by the way, eh! Raffles, to induce you to influence me favourably in her behalf?" demanded Abednego, still chuckling.

"You seem to have an instinctive insight into these matters, sir," said the clerk, with a facetious grin. "Her ladyship offered me ten per cent., if, through you or any other Money-lender, I could effect a levy for her. It was unnecessary to apprise so fine a lady that it is worth your while to pay me so liberal a salary to be honest, that honesty is every way my best policy. Poor soul! I was almost sorry for her on handing her into the grand turn-out waiting for her opposite the counting-house door."

"Keep your pity, my good friend, for worthier objects," cried the Money-lender, proceeding to sort some papers on the table beside him. "I have been giving the foolish woman a lesson. To no purpose, however—a mere waste of eloquence. The moth will singe her silly wings again, nay, probably perish in the flame, the first opportunity."

"Scarcely five-and-twenty, to judge by her appearance," cried the confidential clerk, "yet already so debased. It is afflicting, it is positively afflicting."

"Her ladyship's bright eyes seem to have wrought the charm upon the *man*, which they attempted vainly to work upon the

master!" cried Abednego, with a sneer. "You are growing as soft as a bale of cotton, Raffles. Take heed, my man, or you will become unfit for your employment. However, since this cunning hussy seems to have touched your compassion, you shall even carry her the cheque, by means of which I intend to prevent her, not from flinging herself into the Serpentine, or buying two-penn'orth of ratsbane, of neither of which feats she has further purpose than you or I, but to preserve her already tarnished name from becoming as black as such excess of levity on the part of the mother of a family might render it. I have intimated to one of her brothers, a gallant man, to whom her honour is dear, the mad course she is pursuing; and till he arrive in town, am bound to exercise some providence over her destinies."

"You intend, then, sir, to accede to her request for this further loan?" said the clerk, evidently astonished. "You will please to remember that I have duly apprised you the security is already exceeded."

"I know it—I know it. Curse the security. Have I not security twice as sterling in her dread of exposure?"

"But if she have not the means of paying, however much exposed?"

"Her family have. The pledge of a name such as hers is as good as diamonds or gold-dust. But at what are you grinning, sir?"

"At the idea of all the invectives so uselessly wasted by the Countess between this chamber and her carriage."

"Ay! I can imagine the torrent of abuse she let forth against poor A. O.; the way with them all! Unless one consent to be fleeced like the rest of their creditors, one becomes dog,—curmudgeon,—robber,—JEW! The poor initials of A. O. have been made the object of more execrations, I suspect, than any other combination of the letters of the alphabet."

"But surely, sir, since you intended to oblige her, you might have spared her the terrible moments of suspense she has had to undergo?"

"And the sermon that preceded it, eh? No, no, Raffles. It is *because* I intended to rescue her out of the jaws of perdition, that I had the courage to reprove. I am too cruel, eh, to these young and tender sinners? I tell you, it were as reasonable to tax the surgeon with cruelty who amputates some gangrened limb to preserve the life of a patient. But enough of this. Let her have her money before five o'clock. By the way, cash the cheque I have written, as you go along the Strand, which will secure her from the humiliation of presenting the draft of a Money-lender. *She* will attribute my relenting, of course, to the eloquence wrung out of you by the influence of her proffered ten per cent. Ha! ha! ha! Better so. It would be the ruin of me if I got the reputation of being chicken-hearted. By the way, you have given instructions, I hope, to Cognovit, to proceed against the old Viscount?"

"I have, sir."

"And to make out a writ against—"

Basil Annesley now shouted so loudly as to disturb the equa-

animity of both the Money-lender and his clerk. He had no wish to pry more extensively into such transactions as he foresaw were about to be disclosed.

"Who the deuce is in the pigeon-hole?" demanded Abednego.

"It is certainly not the voice of Zebedee," replied Raffles; and before Basil could reiterate his signal, part of the wall seemed to recede beside him; the moveable panel, dividing the trap from the council-chamber of the Money-lender, being withdrawn.

The confidential clerk instantly collared the skulking stranger.

"Your pistols, sir, your pistols!" shouted Raffles to his superior. "'Tis some housebreaker, some burglar. I have him fast!"

"Loose him again, then; and thank your stars that your noisy zeal has not tempted me into shooting through the head one but for whose aid you would have been now thrown masterless on the world," cried Abednego, who, having snatched a pistol from his bureau and confronted the open panel, instantly descried through the doubtful light, that it was no other than the young guardsman who was struggling in the grasp of his deputy.

"I have sought you in many strange places, Mr. Osalez," observed Basil, calmly stepping into the room, on finding himself released, "and found you sometimes in others equally strange where your presence was wholly unlooked-for. On the present occasion, I had no intention of becoming a spy upon your actions. Though in search of you and at your own desire, I swear to you that I knew not, when thrust into yonder disgraceful cell, to what sort of retreat I was proceeding."

"No need of an oath to confirm your statement," replied A. O., not in the slightest degree embarrassed; "since, unless favoured by the pass-key of one of my agents, it had been impossible for you to wind your way into one of my most secret places of resort. But since you are beginning to affect compunctions of conscience about visiting the den of a Money-lender, it may not be amiss to remind you that, once upon a time, a certain Mr. Basil Annesley—"

"Visited, on a similar errand, a certain A. O.," replied the involuntary spy. "But I came not *then* as a friend. I came not, as now, to——"

"You came *then*, precisely upon the errand as now," retorted Abednego, firmly. "You came, and come, in the hopes of benefiting Verelst. Nay, wherefore deny it? Can you exhibit a better passport to my regard than solicitude for the welfare of my sister's family?"

The astonished clerk lost for a moment his professional air of callous effrontery, in utter amazement, first, at hearing the old Money-lender address, in a tone of affectionate interest, a well-dressed young man of Basil's manners and appearance; and, secondly, at an avowal of kinsmanship with any mortal living on the part of A. O., whom he had hitherto regarded as an insulated being, a sort of mysterious automaton composed of gold and arithmetic, who was equally likely to have emerged from the Great Pyramid or from St. Giles's Charity School, so utterly disconnected did he appear from the ordinary associations of life.

It was highly mortifying to the astonished and inquisitive Raffles, when, a moment afterwards, Abednego signified his desire to be alone with his handsome young visitor; and, apparently on his guard against the habits of duplicity he had inculcated into his subordinates, followed him gravely across the dining-room as he retreated, and carefully locked the door upon him after his departure; an unmistakeable signal, in that mysterious establishment, that no possible emergency, short of the house being on fire, was to entitle the people of the Money-lender to intrude upon his privacy.

"And now," said Abednego, after returning to the room, and reinstalling himself in his sanctum, "seat yourself, I entreat, and let us have a few minutes' unmolested conversation."

"Excuse me," replied Basil, glancing through the still open panel along the dark corridor. "I have left my horse yonder in the street, under the care of a stranger—"

"Under the care of one of my confidential agents, or you would not be here," retorted Abednego. "Fear nothing. Zebedee has something of a taste for horse-flesh. It was he I employed to seize the Duke of Rochester's stud at Newmarket. The fellow will take good care of your hack."

So saying, he closed the panel by a spring, and came and sat himself down over against Basil, in the chair in which he had mused so exultingly after the departure of the Countess of Winterfield.

But with his usual tact of discrimination, he instantly discerned the unfavourable impression made on the young man by the scene he had recently witnessed. Young Annesley was cold, unexpansive, uncordial; neither disposed to receive with applause the biting jests of his companion, nor listen with respect to his homilies. The open-hearted soldier seemed resolved to demonstrate his consciousness of being in company with a professional Money-lender.

For some minutes, Abednego attempted to wrestle with this sudden mistrust. But finding all his efforts to raise a smile or command attention abortive, he suddenly burst forth into a more genuine strain.

"I see how it is," cried he. "I have lost your regard. The warm interest of a young heart like yours fell like dew upon my old age; reviving feelings I had never expected to find re-existent in my withered heart. And, already, the fountain is dried up,—the desert again parched. Master as I am of millions, that first spontaneous impulse of human sympathy towards me, I prized above them all. And now, you hate me! I see it in your face. I hear it in your voice, or rather in your silence. Do not deny it, Basil Annesley, you are on the verge of loathing and despising the unfortunate A. O."

"*Unfortunate!*" repeated Basil, with a smile.

"Ay, most unfortunate!" reiterated Abednego. "A victim from his birth—*before* his birth,—a foredoomed outcast,—a predestined paria,—a——"

"Pause for a moment, Mr. Osalez," interposed Basil. "Far be

it from me to surprise the secrets of your prison-house. Reflect, I entreat, before you enter into rash confidences which you may be hereafter disposed to repent."

"No!" cried the Money-lender, his countenance evincing tokens of uncontrollable emotion. "The time is come, I feel that I cannot support the withering weight of your contempt. I must speak or die. I *must* vindicate myself. Let there be, at least, one human being entitled to examine and dispassionately judge, the real position and provocations of Abednego Osalez.

"In that name, Basil, consists the secret of my destinies," resumed the Money-lender, after a pause, "for it is that of a Jew; incontestably that of a Jew. Comport myself as I may in accordance with all Christian canons, though I may fear GOD and love my neighbour as myself, nay, though, as St. Paul hath it, I give my body to be burned, what profiteth it me? I bear a Jewish name. My patronymic smells of the Synagogue. I am a Jew,—I *must* be a Jew. The world avoucheth it, and who is to gainsay the world? Opinion, vulgar opinion, hath placed me among the children of Israel. Basil Annesley, such is the influence that hath overmastered the impulses of nature,—such the social tyranny that hath made me what I am.

"Listen to my story.

"I was born, as Verelst has probably informed you, the only son of a wealthy merchant of Cadiz, trading with the whole commercial world, but chiefly with England, my mother, and my father's mother, being alike natives of that country. It was, in fact, on the marriage of my grandfather with a young Protestant of honourable extraction, a countrywoman of your own, that he renounced the church of his forefathers; thereby entitling himself to all the charities and indulgences of the Christian faith.

"His recantation was an act of pure conviction. For my grandfather, rich as a Doria or a Medicis, was a man of spirit and intelligence; and even the passion he had conceived for the daughter of an English admiral, would not have beguiled him into a capitulation of conscience.

"By his conversion, he turned, of course, against himself, the hands and hearts of his people. He made enemies of kith and kin. All those in whose veins his blood was flowing soon proved to him, and to the world, that those kindred drops were converted to the bitterness of gall. Had he not a right, however, to conclude that the church to whose bosom he had betaken himself would strive to heal the wounds inflicted by their malice? Had he not cause to believe that the newly-converted Christian would be, by Christians, Christianly entreated?

"It was not so. In Cadiz, where he abided, the people were at that time illiterate bigots; and to the end of his days, my grandfather's sumptuous mansion was pointed out by the populace as that of 'Osalez the Jew!' Had he embraced the Catholic faith, the case might have been different. But the burnt-offerings of his zeal smoked not on the altars of their cathedral; and they consequently persisted in opprobriating him as 'Osalez the JEW!'

"Of that time, I remember nothing. My grandfather diedsoon

after I saw the light. But I remember overhearing legendary whisperings by our fireside, betwixt his venerable widow and my father, of the times when, on occasions of popular tumult, it became essential to conciliate the populace by prodigal benefactions, lest they should attack and spoliate, in the harbour or on the quays, the vessels or merchandise of 'the Jew of Cadiz.'

"Was this rational? Has not the God of Christians expressly declared, that there is more joy in Heaven over the sinner that repenteth, than over the ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance? And which, I pray you, hath done more for the Christian Church, the man who sacrifices the love of kindred, and the predilections and belief of his ancestors, to cling to the Cross, or he to whom a lukewarm faith is transmitted by his forefathers; who accepts it unexamined, yet prospers under the green olive groves of ecclesiastical protection, while the Jewish neophyte is compelled to drag, as a burthen in the dust, the galling weight of that Cross which he hath voluntarily and zealously adopted.

"Again I ask, Basil Annesley, is this rational? But when was the population of a priest-ridden country ever rational? My father, who at his mother's desire, had been educated in her native country, was deeply affected by this mistrust and evil dealing. In England, therefore, did he linger, even after his education was completed. In England, did he love, and wed, and become a father; nor was it till after my birth, that the sudden death of his father, compelled his return to Cadiz.

"Fain would he, from that moment, have extricated himself from commercial life, realized his property, and established himself permanently in the land of religious freedom and scientific enlightenment. But it was impossible. His capital was so widely diffused, —his foreign connections (especially with the English colonies in the East) were of so widely spreading a nature,—that the remainder of his life was expended in attempting to extract the root of these ramifications in order to abjure the merchant craft.

"Nothing more heart-gnawing than the bitterness engendered by consciousness of a defeated purpose. Osalez, 'the *son* of the Jew,' though the wealthiest citizen in Cadiz, while his vessels were hailed in every port of Europe, and while his voice decreed the existence of plenty or famine for hundreds of thousands, was a miserable man. The corn, wine, and oil, in his rich warehouses conveyed no food to his soul. In Spain,—in Catholic Spain,—he seemed to stand aloof from the community, as his father had done before him. He became a widower; and not the poorest of his brother merchants would have been content to bestow his daughter in marriage upon 'the son of Osalez the JEW.'

"Again I ask you, Basil Annesley, was this rational? My poor father, fancying that in England,—liberal England,—such prejudices were unadmitted, still looked forward. The time would come, he fancied, when he should find a successor rich enough to undertake his speculations, and invest millions in his vast undertakings. 'And then, my boy,' was ever and ever his cry, 'then will I set up my staff in the happiest and freest country in the world. England is the land of commerce. *There* the origin of our opulence will be

respected; and the estates, in the purchase of which I intend to invest the greater portion of my capital, will give you a stake in the country, entitling you to a voice in its legislation. You shall have a seat in Parliament, Abednego. With your talents, and the education that is to perfect them, you may achieve public distinction, and become the founder of an honourable family.

"I could almost wish *now* that I had bestowed on you at your baptism a name savouring less of the repellent origin of our ancient house. But when you were christened, the old man my father was yet alive; and I shrunk from inflicting a pang upon his warm heart by appearing ashamed of the name he had inflicted on myself, which was that of the father of his father. To the unlucky appellative of Abednego I have been myself indebted for half the odium attached in Cadiz to 'the son of Osalez the Jew.' Nevertheless, whenever that title of reprobation meets my ear, I think of my father's grey hairs, and am content. So may it be with yourself. Should you ever have to smart under its contumelious application, recal to mind the motives of your parents, and be patient.

"Such, Basil, were the views of this excellent man in affording me what is esteemed the first of English educations at a public school and the university. He could bear to part with me; for he was again wedded, and the father of a little girl, whom he had piously named Rachel.

"I was a smart and forward boy. From my infancy I had received in my father's house that best of schooling—the society of the wise and liberal. The table of the rich Osalez was open to all that was enlightened or distinguished in his native city; the Hidalgos, whom it was so often in his power to oblige—the Archbishop—the Governor—the Commandant—the noblest and best in the place. The appointments and entertainments of our house were sumptuous as those of the merchant-princes of Italy; and to what level will not the meanness of empty pride descend for the indulgence of its sensual pleasures! I quitted Spain for England with the impression that we were a great and powerful family; and that I should find elsewhere the consideration and obsequiousness I had met with from the guests and dependents of my father.

"The haughty boy was destined to a rough lesson. Shall I ever forget that first week at Eton! Shall I ever outlive the recollection of the swelling heart with which I nightly retired to my pillow, after hearing reiterated around me the opprobrious cry of 'Abednego the Jew!' In the course of the first day not one of my young schoolmates but had inquired after my brothers—Shadrach and Meshech. The bed I was moistening with my tears was called the burning fiery furnace, and every morsel of my food embittered by offers of a slice of pork or other savoury meats the object of Jewish abomination.

"At length I turned upon my persecutors. Like other badgered schoolboys, I tried, in the first instance, the force of my puny arm, and fought, and was first beaten in the ring, and then chastised for having fought. I bore all bravely, because my triumphs as a scholar already afforded me a prospect of humiliating my adver-

saries with the force of higher weapons. I felt greatness struggling within me. My aspiring soul resolved to raise itself above the level of the gibbering lordlings by whom I was despised.

"'They shall hear of me yet—they shall *feel* me yet!' was the inward suggestion that spurred on my lagging scholarship, till I became an object of general wonder; my English verses, my proficiency as a Grecian, being equally themes of praise. The masters began to cite me among themselves as a youth of singular promise, likely to distinguish himself in public life.

"Then came the habitual rejoinder—'Poor fellow! with such abilities, it is a thousand pities he should be a Jew.'

"But he is *not* a Jew—neither he nor his parents!' was the indignant retort of the head-master.

"'Impossible! *the name!*—Abednego Osalez. Besides, look in his face—*only* look at his face. Eyes, features, hair! there is Jew impressed on every lineament.'

"The first time remarks of this description reached my ear I recalled to mind, with bitter consciousness, the air of sadness sometimes overspreading my father's countenance as he gazed on my own. Often, when addressed by his parasites with laudations of my personal beauty, I had heard him murmur, while they were admiring the Oriental fire of my eyes or glossy blackness of my hair, 'Would, *would* that he had inherited the Saxon fairness of his poor mother! My face may prove a disastrous portion for that noble boy.'

"Prophetic words, Basil, as the taunts of my schoolmates and more polished irony of my college companions soon taught me to my cost.

"Still, though wounded and smarting, I was not desperate. I hated my name—I detested my origin as the source of unjust aspersions; but I did not yet *hate* the world. Just as my father and grandfather had said, in extenuation of the scoffs and mistrusts of Cadiz, 'These people are ignorant and priest-ridden; their insolence merits only our pity,' did I say in my turn, 'Why heed the sarcasms of boys and striplings? The award that is to determine my position in life must be pronounced by men and women.'

"But of the spell included in that latter word, Basil, little did I then estimate the power. At Oxford politics became my favourite study. The burning ambition of my soul was to distinguish myself in Parliament. I doubt whether the most fervent patriot ever panted with fonder desire for an occasion of serving his country than I for the honours of senatorial renown. I was convinced that on the walls of the House of Commons hung the escutcheon of my future ennoblement. It was there I had to win the laurels destined to replace the absence of an hereditary coronet—

There, either I must live, or have no life!

"Never, for a moment, did I mistrust the strength of my own powers. Like the Pythoness, I was conscious of the divinity within me. I felt master of my own destinies, and, through *them*,

of the opinion of the world. It was my ambition only to raise myself to the level of my fellow-creatures—to redeem myself from unmerited obloquy. The desire to set my foot upon the neck of mankind arose in later life. As yet, I dreamed only of what appeared easy of achievement, and, so long as the illusion lasted, was at peace with myself and with the world.

"The covert insults that sometimes assailed me fell unnoticed on my ear. The name I was about to create for myself would soon, I fancied, obliterate that of Abednego Osalez.

"Alas! how should I have shuddered—how recoiled with horror—had any one, at that period, presumed to predict to me the humiliating career of the future A. O.!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

Their hate was yelp'd against me
With the unmeaning rage of some wild dog,
That bays at shadows. FORD.

IT was not till after a pause of some minutes, during which the irritation of the Money-lender appeared somewhat soothed by the sympathy and interest manifested in his recital by his young companion, that he resumed, in a less excited tone and manner:

"Mankind are more what they are made by mankind than what they are made by their Creator," said Osalez. "The wolf is ferocious because from a whelp hunted. The snake turns upon you because you disturb and pursue it. The child grows surly because unjustly coerced. But, above all, man becomes unjust and cruel because pursued with cruelty and injustice by his brother-man. I was born imbued with the original sin of human nature. Yet certain am I that there were noble purposes in my soul, which the scorn of my fellow-creatures converted into wickedness. The germ of goodness was there: watered with poison, it brought forth deadly fruit!

"Full of eagerness, full of trust in myself and others, I entered into life. My father made me a splendid allowance, an allowance doubling that of the richest nobleman at the university; and though this told against me in one sense, by the perpetual citation of 'the rich Osalez—*rich* as a JEW!' it enabled me to confer obligations insuring me hosts of fashionable associates.

"For them, I was only 'Osalez,'—Osalez who had such famous hunters, such capital wine, and such a knowing curricle always at the service of his friends; and to *be* my friend was consequently the pretension of half my acquaintance. Those who delighted to dine and drive with me, or rather *for* me, introduced me to their families; and by degrees I became (on sufferance, though I little suspected it) a favoured guest in the *beau monde*.

"I was happy, young, handsome,—as handsome as the Jewish physiognomy which my grandfather's conversion could not efface from our hereditary nature, would permit. I was admired,—flattered,—followed,—nay, fancied myself *beloved!*"

"And why not?" said Basil Annesley, courteously, fancying that his excited companion paused for the encouragement of a kindly word.

"Why NOT? Because my name was ABEDNEGO,—and because I looked like a Jew!—

"Listen, Basil. I had won the highest honours of the university; and before entering the Parliamentary career, to which, at that period, money secured the entrée, I thought it my duty to visit my father. Would I could adequately describe the rapture with which he welcomed me, and the pride he took in my proficiency! Would you could have seen the passionate admiration of my poor little sister, and the partial kindness of my step-mother! In that household, more splendid than almost any of those I had left in London, I was a demigod.

"I would fain pass over that epoch of my life," said Abednego, in a lower voice. "The reminiscences it must awaken may possibly expose me as a weakling in your eyes. Nevertheless, to enable you to judge my cause,—all—all must be disclosed.

"It was winter, Basil. Leaving my hunters at the disposal of my shallow friends, I hurried to Cadiz, at a season when its climate is peculiarly grateful; and, after long immurement in the murky realms of Great Britain, dear, indeed, was my delight in the softness of that southern atmosphere, and the fragrance of its long-forgotten orange blooms. Till then, I had not imagined the intensity of enjoyment which pleasures so purely physical are able to impart.

"But they were *not* purely physical. I enjoyed them so keenly only because I shared them with another; another—young, fair, noble, generous,—already dear, and soon to become dearer than life.

"The family of an English nobleman was passing the winter at Cadiz, for the benefit of the health of an only son, who was supposed to inherit a consumptive tendency. One of his lordship's daughters—one of his three daughters—"

Again, Abednego paused; and Basil Annesley, in spite of his eager and growing interest in the narrative, had the forbearance to entreat him once more to desist from his painful task. But at that suggestion, Abednego resumed his firmness.

"Till my arrival at home," said he, as if assuming a peremptory mastery over his emotions, "these people, these noble exiles had been overcome with *ennui*. With the exception of her to whom I have alluded, not one of the family was mentally endowed to find satisfaction in the mere beauties of nature or the attractions of a strange country. Both father and sisters repined after the pleasures of the fashionable world; hungering and thirsting for news of society, the gossip of the clubs, the frivolities of aristocratic life.

"They welcomed me, therefore, with delight. The splendid entertainments of my father, to whom his lordship had brought letters of introduction as to the first merchant of the city, and in one of whose mansions he was domiciled, assumed a new charm in their eyes. They were constantly in the society of my step-mother, who was a pleasing and accomplished woman; and I, I who appeared to belong to a world which, as regarded Cadiz, had hitherto

been exclusively their own, was admitted into their circle as a familiar and honoured guest.

"How I loved her, Basil Annesley,—that youngest and fairest daughter of the house," resumed Abednego, after a short pause, "it matters not now to relate. How she loved *me*, my utmost protestations would scarcely entitle you to believe. We were of one mind—one heart. So short was our acquaintance ere it ripened into love, and soon, into intensest passion, that it were fruitless to detail its progress. We were constantly together. At the opera, in morning promenades, in marine excursions, the wealth and influence of my father in the city enabled me to enhance and secure their enjoyments; while the presence of the woman of my heart sufficed solely to my own.

"What a dream it was—what joy—what madness! Restrained, however, by the presence of her sisters, and, even at her tender age, conscious that I should be an unacceptable suitor to her haughty father, she was the first to propose clandestine meetings. The gardens of our two mansions nearly adjoined; and, favoured by the climate, we met, as southern lovers do, by stealth, and in the quiet moonlight; met often, and parted undiscovered. She was already my plighted wife. It needed only her father's sanction to make her mine for ever.

"By her own desire, however, my formal demand for her hand was still delayed.

"'Your great riches,' said she, 'may somewhat avail to smooth down the difficulties likely to arise on the part of my family. Still, I foresee that your Jewish name and origin will form an obstacle all but insuperable. Render that name renowned, dearest Osalez, and half the difficulty will be overcome. Distinguish yourself in Parliament. Even as contact with the divinity converted a gibbet into the emblem of salvation, the instincts of genius consecrate with distinction the most ignominious origin. Come to my father to claim my hand as one who has commanded the applause of senates, and he will not presume to treat you with the disdain I apprehend.

"Stung by even the hint of scornful entreatment, my wounded pride stimulated me to fresh exertions; nay, gave me courage to bid her farewell, with a view to a speedier and more auspicious meeting. The family was to be in England early in the summer. By that time, I doubted not that opportunity would prosper all I meditated. The parliamentary agent employed by my father's London solicitors had made arrangements for my coming forward for a Government borough, on the creation of a batch of peers whose patents were already in progress.

"To London, therefore, I hastened; sustained, even in the anguish of parting from an object engrossing every feeling of my heart, by the ardent desire to render myself worthy, or rather *prove* myself worthy of pretending to her hand.

"Not a moment did I mistrust my own powers. The University had fixed its *imprimatur* on my scholarship; and already, the eyes of many were upon me. All I needed to acquire a position in society was the passport which parliamentary distinction, more

especially at the period of a national crisis such as was then imminent, rarely fails to confer.

"But, alas! the borough offered to me for purchase, by the inertness or incapacity of our agent, slipped through our hands; and bitter was my disappointment on finding that a week's delay at Cadiz, conceded to the prayers of that beloved being at the moment of bidding her farewell, had been fatal to our prospects. So far from realizing the promises I had made her, she would find me, on her return to England, the same obscure individual who had quitted her; and perhaps hear me rejected by her proud father as 'the grandson of Osalez the Jew.'

"Distracted by this apprehension, and still more by the idea that, should I want courage to make the attempt, some more appropriate match might present itself, which the jealousy of her sisters, with whom she was no favourite, because a favourite with all the world beside, would induce his lordship to press upon her acceptance, I resolved to leave no effort unattempted, however rash, to accomplish my purpose. At that moment, the sudden death of one of the members for a cathedral town prospered my views. Aware that my father would consider no expenditure excessive which served our ends, I determined to dare the contest. With money—eloquence—an unblemished character,—the chances seemed in my favour. So, at least, I was assured by the solicitors whose sole object in my election was the amount of their bill. They advised me to hurry down to L——, on the assurance of having smoothed my way to the hustings.

"Never shall I forget the elation of my spirits during that journey. I rejoiced at having declined the attendance of the men of business who had proposed bearing me company. For Hope was my companion by the way; promising all that can make glad the heart of youth,—a happy home,—a blessed, beauteous, loving wife,—and, when tempted forth from my glad fireside, the esteem and honour of my fellow-men.

"Such were my feelings and aspirations, Basil, when, on a bright and sunshiny afternoon, I entered L——. As I approached the city, the aspect of its population seemed to possess a peculiar interest in my eyes, as the people for whom I was about to exercise the first flow of my expanding intellect and human charities. They were about to be entrusted to my care, as a fold to a shepherd; the constituency over whose welfare I was to be the providence! Do you yet know enough of the world, young sir, to appreciate the absurdity,—the vulgarity,—of such generous emotions?"

The eager narrator had now worked himself anew into his former excitement; and the low and mournful voice in which, as with a plaintive organ-stop, he had been describing his felicitous dream of early love, gradually gave place to harsh and abrupt impetuosity.

"Well, sir! I entered the city," he resumed. "You have probably witnessed the triumphal entries of candidates on such flattering occasions: laurels,—ribbons,—largesses to the populace,—feasting,—junketing,—music,—clamour,—all that money can concede or extort from the venal energies of popular nature. Those

men of mud whom we fondly call the people, gave me back, with interest, the huzzas I had purchased. But on entering the market-place, Basil, and confronting the opposition party, the first object that met my eyes was my own effigy roasting in the midst of a burning fiery furnace, surrounded with placards of 'What true Christian will vote for Abednego the Jew?'—'No circumcision.'—'Now Barabbas was a robber'—with pork griskins stuck on poles, and every other insulting emblem supposed to be abhorrent to my imputed faith.

"I was irritated, but nothing further. Conscious of the inapplicability of these whips and scorns of vulgar derision, the usual implement of the hustings, I conceived that nothing would be easier than to undeceive the population of L—. In almost every great assemblage, reason preponderates: and having, in my speech, on the first day's poll, uttered the most solemn denial of my imputed Judaism, and appealed to the support of the ecclesiastical interest of the city, to which I conscientiously pledged my own, I fancied the mischief overcome.

"My eloquence made a manifest sensation. I was cheered by the people, and encouraged by the gentry. But during the night, my adversaries got up a further storm of insult. Placards representing Shylock, knife and scales in hand, prepared to cut off the pound of flesh, greeted me on emerging from my inn, intermingled with representations of the martyrdom of Little St. Hugh, whose tomb, unfortunately, graced the adjoining cathedral, the legend of whose barbarous murder by 'the Jew's daughter,' was roared round the hustings by a score of stentorian voices. Every time I opened my lips to address the multitude, I was interrupted with

> As it fell out one holiday,
> Small rain did fall,—
> And all the boys in merry Lincoln
> Were met to play at ball;
> Little Hugh he struck at the first—
> He struck it into the Jew's hall;
> The Jew's daughter came out,
> And unto him did call—

till the name of St. Hugh of Lincoln became indeed accursed in my ears!

"The bigotry of Cadiz was pale and tame, in short, compared with that of the cathedral town! Suffice it, that after throwing away thousands of pounds, I lost my election; and far more than my election—my trust in the justice of mankind,—nay, the justice of Providence itself!

"I ask you again, Basil Annesley, was it rational that I should be thus reviled and rejected—untried—unheard—and a booby squire preferred in my place, simply because some wag had written on the walls previous to my nomination—'What is your name?' 'ABEDNEGO!'—'Who gave you that name?' 'The high priest of the synagogue, in my baptism!'

"A thousand crushing thoughts came crowding into my soul when I re-entered London the following day. I was defeated: and the bitterness of a defeated candidate is proverbial. P

never did defeat convey, like mine, extinction of every prospect of distinction, every hope of earthly happiness. Parliament was the Promethean torch that was to endow me with vitality; and lo! the living spark was quenched!

"It was then, Basil, that, for the first time, I learnt to appreciate the value of MONEY. In place of the Providence I was beginning to mistrust, the Molten Calf became my GOD. I said not to myself, like Lucifer, 'Evil, be thou my good!'—but 'Gold, be thou my guardian angel!' For the solicitors, by whose inaptitude I had been so ill supported, now whispered in my ear, that perhaps they might still be able to *purchase* a seat; and *this* time, they so far redeemed their word, that, within a fortnight from the silvery whisper reaching my ear, a spendthrift lordling had accepted the Chiltern Hundreds, the credit side of my banker's book was lessened by an item of five thousand pounds, and Abednego Osalez took his seat in the House of Commons.

"And now, Basil, *now*, my way seemed clear before me. I was a member of the most enlightened legislative assembly in the world, and my reputation was in the keeping of the free press of the land of liberty. Forests of laurels seemed shooting up before me. I anticipated fame, I anticipated popularity, I anticipated, I—Great GOD!" exclaimed the excited man, interrupting himself, "the flame of joy and triumph that swelled my veins at that moment seems rushing back anew into my heart, warm with the glowing energies of youth. All the wealth of my bursting coffers would be insufficient to requite the enjoyment of one sunny day of the unsullied brightness of that boyish confidence!"

"But surely, *in parliament*, the unjust and groundless prejudice you have described did not pursue you?" demanded Annesley, deeply interested, yet almost alarmed by the vehemence of his companion.

"Even in parliament, sir," resumed Abednego, in a more subdued tone, "even in the parliament of *liberal* England, *enlightened* England, I was still 'Osalez the Jew!' They went further, these upright legislators, than the bigots of Cadiz. With them, I was not the *son* of the Jew, but *the* Jew. Though admitting me to be, by extraction, a Spaniard, by birth, an Englishman, by faith, a Protestant, I was still 'Osalez the Jew!' My name and face avouched it; and are not a name and face authentic evidence in any other spot of earth than a court of justice?

"When I spoke well in the House, it was 'well enough for a Jew;' when ill, 'what could be *expected* of a Jew?' The measures I advocated were stigmatized by the press, as brought forward under the protection of the Jews; and the whole repertory of waggish and vulgar jocularity was unloosed against me every time I opened my lips.

"I was almost maddened. Had I entered my public career at a maturer period of life, I should have known how to repress such sneers, or how to retort upon my scorners. But I was a boy. The generous impulses of youth were warm within me. Writhing under a sense of injustice, I lost my temper. I sometimes spoke vilely; and then, indeed, was the cry redoubled, that 'The second Daniel had broken down. But what could be expected of a man with such a name as Abednego?'

"A sarcastic member of the Opposition, whose wit was armed as with the stings of asps, attacked me one night in reply to an effective speech on the corn-laws, by which I had commanded the attention of the House, with the sneer that, 'He was aware that the honourable member's namesake and predecessor was memorable in scripture history through the persecutions of a king who fed on *grass*. But it did not follow that the Abednego of modern times was to become famous by his association with CORN.'

"The House was convulsed with laughter at this sorry jest; and the laugh of parliament burns as with the caustic impress of the branding iron. The morning papers enlarged upon the pleasantry, which was echoed by all the underlings of the press; and before I had been three months in the House of Commons, instead of commanding the attention due to my abilities and good faith, I had become a laughing-stock as 'Corn-law Abednego.'

"Still, there was comfort in perspective. The woman I loved was too true, too good, too fond, to be influenced by the voice of vulgar derision. *She* knew that I was neither a Jew, nor the son of a Jew. *She* knew that my education had been liberal, my habits of life luxurious; and the low-bred citations regarding Monmouth-street and Duke's-place, over *her*, at least, could have little influence. Even if her father should refuse me her hand, she, my tender, faithful, trusting love, could not recal the gift of her heart.

"The family returned to England, Basil; the family which for months and months had accepted the hospitality of my father. Their door was shut in my face!

"In the interim, my engagement with her for whom I would have sacrificed my life, had been discovered; and all further intercourse between us interdicted.

"The brother was still so infirm as to afford a fair plea for retiring instantly into the country; and in the aristocratic seclusion of his own park, the old lord fancied himself able to hold at bay the presumptuous importunities of the grandson of the Jew of Cadiz."

"And you pursued them, of course?" cried Basil Annesley, a new species of interest mingling with his curiosity. "You accepted dismissal from no other lips than those of her you loved?"

"I pursued them," resumed his companion, half closing his eyes, as if to reconcentrate himself into the illusions of retrospection. "I pursued them. I saw her again. We met as before, Basil, by stealth. The summer nights favoured our frequent interviews. Again she pledged her faith to me; again she swore, through good or evil report, to be faithful. But we were discovered, and—spare me the recital! Through the instrumentality of her sisters, there was a cruel scene of detection. A struggle ensued, a fatal struggle, in which the infirm brother was disabled. As I live and breathe, Basil, it was not I who inflicted the fatal injury—but he died! The inquest absolved me. Surgical examination proved that the accidental bursting of a blood-vessel had proved fatal.

"To renew my intercourse with the family, after this dreadful event and the terrible publicity given to our cause of quarrel, was impossible. The very attempt had been an insult. My beloved

wrote to me entreating forbearance. 'Overtures on my part, she said, would, perhaps, hurry her broken-hearted father into the grave. But still she swore, again and again, with the fervid earnestness that woman only knows how to assume, that, whatever time or distance might divide us, for this world and the next she was my own,—'in the sight of GOD, my wife!' In the sight of GOD?—Alas! even *she*, perhaps, felt that the mightiest of names might be appealed to in vain by so utter an outcast as Osalez the Jew."

"Compose yourself, sir," murmured Basil, in a kindly voice, on perceiving that big tears were rolling down the withered cheeks of his companion. "Disturb yourself no further to talk of this."

"Now, or never!" cried the old man, with a strong effort over his feelings. "I complied, Basil, with her injunctions. The session was over. I returned to Cadiz with the intention of at least six months' absence from England and *her*. But, what a spot had I chosen to nourish my regrets! The groves, the gardens, in which we had wandered, hand in hand,—the same white walls, steeped in the same moonlight, were ever around me; and she whose soul had been conjoined there with mine in ecstatic delirium,—*she* was afar, weeping, lonely, disconsolate, waiting for me—sorrowing for me! In that thought, however, there was comfort. My tears flowed the more, but the more soothingly, when I remembered that all my sorrows were shared by that dearest of all human beings.

"Within three months, Basil, from the day of my arrival at Cadiz, the newspaper was placed in my hand which announced her marriage with another!"

"What treachery!" burst involuntarily from the lips of the young man, though a terrible suspicion had already presented itself to his mind, connecting the narrative now unfolded with the revelations of the old gardener.

"Treachery most monstrous and most ungrateful," rejoined, with kindling eyes, the excited Abednego. "And lo! on that day I swore an oath before God, an oath to be mightily avenged, avenged on both,—on all,—the husband,—the wife—the proud, obdurate family.—And I was so! My cry to the Almighty for vengeance has at least prospered."

"Before you proceed further, sir, consider a moment," interposed Basil, perplexed and distressed. "Let not the excitement of the moment betray you into avowals which you may hereafter repent."

"I *have* considered, and would fain you should know all," replied the old man, in a milder tone.

"And first, to judge me fairly,—to judge me leniently,—reflect upon the misery of my position. Reflect that I had ventured my 'all of earthly happiness in that frail barque, and that the wreck was total!' My hopes were withered. Nothing was left me in this world,—nothing but MONEY! In the first struggles of my anguish, I resigned my seat in Parliament, and abjured the country by which I had been so despitefully treated and persecuted. I abandoned England. But I brought neither peace nor honour to my home. My father, whose highest ambitions were baffled by my despair, became himself surly and desponding, and thus

the cause as well as the victim of despair, like the stricken man of Uz, 'my face became foul with weeping, and on my eyelids was the shadow of death. My days were past, my purposes broken off, even the thoughts of my heart. Because God had made me a by-word to the people, when aforetime I was as a tabret. Because He had stripped me of my glory, and taken my crown from my head. Because young children despised me: and when I arose they spake against me. Because my inward friends despised me, and they whom I loved turned against me.'

"Thus aggrieved and thus resentful, domestic comfort soon forsook our gloomy household; and my young sister was fain to look abroad for comfort. Soon after my return, her mother died; and thus left alone with her fractious father and surly brother, the poor girl bestowed her affections on the only individual admitted within our doors;—Verelst,—whom her father had engaged for her tuition in painting,—though, as a man of genius travelling for the perfectionment of his art, superior to the condition of an ordinary professor.

"When apprised of her attachment, my animosity to the young German, who could afford no home to the cherished flower of our fireside, and whom I unjustly accused of interested views in his attachment, sufficed to prove that I had suffered persecution and learnt no mercy. I advised my father to drive the needy adventurer from our gates; and the consequence was the flight and disastrous marriage of my sister, which precipitated my poor mortified father into the grave.

"I was now the master of millions! The efforts made by my father for the realization of his property, with a view to quitting Spain, had, by this time, nearly completed the centralization of our capital. It was, however, indispensable for the full accomplishment of this object, retarded by the old man's death, that I should visit the East; in various parts of which, my predecessors had maintained mercantile establishments.

"The expedition pleased me. I wished to behold mankind in an unconventionalized condition. I wanted to look upon the land which had given birth to my ill-fated race. Already, my views of social morality were sufficiently disorganized;—in the East, I thoroughly threw off the prejudices of civilization, To behold other creeds established as firmly, and producing results as beneficial, and more consonant with, the demands of climate and country than Christianity, convinced me that the all-seeing God,—to whom altars, like thrones, are but the footstools of his Power,—who, for his own wise purposes, has apportioned the faith of the Mussulman to one tropic, of the Brahmin to another,—who revealed, by the lips of his prophets, centuries and centuries before the birth of Christ, the great sacrifice of Redemption, and the cruelty of the Hebrews by which alone it was accomplishable,—must behold with sentiments of mercy, wide from the vengeance imputed to Him by the implacable mind of man, the hereditary responsibility of the children of Israel for the predestined crime of their forefathers.

"Thenceforward, the Jews with whom I was classed, became,

in my eyes, as any other people; save in being more unjustly aspersed, and consequently more deserving commiseration.

"Amid the succeeding changes of religion and legislation I was compelled to witness, variations which render morality a matter of latitude and longitude, and the virtues of one hemisphere the vices of the other, I began to look around me for a substantial and tangible standard of merit.

"'What,' I exclaimed, 'what constitutes right and wrong? *Where* is the Positive, *where* the True!' The answer, Basil Annesley, was—Gold."

"Who will deny that, over all nations and languages, under the tyranny of one or the tyranny of many, the majesty of the crown or the majesty of the tiara, Mammon holds the preponderating influence?—Gold, gold, gold, constitutes the To Καλον—the sole divinity,—the Jehovah of the universal earth.

"Once convinced of this, I bowed down my knee and worshipped. Long and eagerly in search of some First Cause in which to put my trust, I cried aloud with joy when I had found it. My wandering ark had stuck upon the top of an Ararat; and I sought no better land as a resting-place for the sole of my foot."

CHAPTER XIX.

Oh, gorgeous, glorious East!—Of man and God
The better birthplace,—in creation's scale
Heaven aptly placed the first! VANE.

"My projects of earthly happiness had been so various and so rudely discomfited, that having at length adopted a system of positive enjoyment,—a glowing materialism, the means of which were existent in the vivid impulses of health seething within me, and the enormous wealth bursting from my coffers,—I seemed to begin life anew:—casting behind me all painful retrospections, as well as every unsatisfactory anticipation for the future.

"Or rather, I had no *need* of anticipations. I lived *in* the moment,—*for* the moment. The glorious climate I was inhaling, the pleasures I was crushing within my arms, sufficed.

"Believe not those who, visiting India for the vulgar purpose of amassing the fortune I carried with me, decry the climate as oppressive, the fruits as tasteless. He who goes thither furnished with the power and means of a satrap, who progresses from kingdom to kingdom burdened by those appliances which smooth all difficulties of travel,—*he* will attest, if indeed, saving myself, such a man ever explored the rugged marvels of the ghauts, or luxuriated in the more than Grecian pastorality of Cashmere, that the pleasures of Europe are tame and colourless beside those which vitalize the seemingly languid regions of the East.

"Those courts which we—the real barbarians—tax as barbaresque more refined in their indolent resources than our pompous Western show of sovereignty, with its pedantry of etiquette, and circumstantiality of ostentation. To my thinking, gorgeousness is

suitable only to a royal pageant, which forms no pretensions to that moral enlightenment which *ought* to rise superior to the pomps and vanities of life.

"In the East, moreover, regal splendour is less superficial. The gem is pure from the matrix,—the precious ore from the mine. No false jewels,—no gilding,—no tinsel,—no substitute of art for the costly treasures lavished on the spot by the prodigality of nature. Even the smiles of woman, if venal, pretend not to the disinterestedness which forms the vilest of masks to European venality. In the East, I loved the *reality* I found in everything around me,—the reality, the abundance, the space, inspiring infinite contempt for those littlenesses of civilization, which rarely affect grandeur, without exhibiting the inflated proportions of comic masks in a winter pantomime. For five years or more, I abided in the East,—in splendour and enjoyment a very satrap!

"Amid my luxurious pleasures, my interests were not neglected: and bringing to the spot an enormous capital, as well as considerable practical insight into the commercial capabilities of Europe, I was enabled to double the splendid fortune bequeathed me by my father.

"Had I not reason, therefore, Basil, to put my trust in my new idol? Gold had doubled my gold, as well as doubled my pleasures. Yet with the restlessness natural to one whose divinity promises no immortality, no spiritual hereafter ennobling our re-absorption into dust and ashes, at the close of a few years, when my pulse beat less wantonly, and my senses became palled by the enjoyments of an enervating climate, I began to ask myself whether intellectual beatitude might not be substituted with advantage for this paradise of the senses. I was now so thoroughly severed from the European mass, that I had nothing to fear from their molestation; and might consequently profit, unheeded, by the prodigious steps which civilization had been making during my absence.

"Great revolutions had been accomplished in Europe. Thrones had been flung down,—dynasties extinguished. The consequences of the French Revolution had made themselves felt even in the country so belaboured into subordination by the rattan of sceptre and crosier; and England still trembled to her centre.

"It was not in England, however, that I was minded to abide. I hated her hypocritical institutions; I despised her pretended zeal for Christianizing the forms of the world, yet ever gainsaying, by her practices, the spirit of Christianity:—persecuting, on pretence of resenting persecution, the wretched remnant of the children of Israel; yet faithless to the holy doctrines of the Cross whenever they traverse her vices or reprove her hardness of heart.

"France, if more a sinner, was at least candid and explicit in her sins; and indifferent, as a naturalized subject of Spain, to the war at that moment proceeding between the Directory and Great Britain, I hurried to Paris, to reap the fruitful harvest of my golden sowing.

"At that epoch, Society, disorganized by the still recent Revolution, was vibrating with those irregular oscillations which

precede the restoration of order. It was the very moment for a man, intent, like myself, upon the lawless pursuit of pleasure, to purchase, at an easy cost, a variety of cumbrous spoils which the recent political convulsions had left masterless.

"A princely hotel in the capital, a noble country residence, once royal, situated on the wooded shores of the Seine, enabled me to establish myself with a degree of magnificence rivalling that of the *Fermiers Généraux* flourishing under the auspices of monarchical corruption. All that was left of aristocracy in Paris crowded to my fêtes, to luxuriate in a renewal of sensual pleasures long withheld from their enjoyment. Half of the *Almanach des Gourmands*, Basil, was composed upon the strength of experiments made in my kitchen; and the last effective notes of Garat were uttered in my *Salle de Concert*.

"No need to corrupt your unsullied imagination, boy, by the description of my effeminate pleasures. They were such as Sardanapalus might have envied; they were such as the ghost of the Marechal de Richelieu should have risen to share;—they were such, that (experience having instructed me in the finite and transient nature of physical enjoyment, and the *ennui* that follows it like a spectral shadow) I have since discerned a charm in privation and abstinence, as a contrast to the wearisome repletion of former days.

"Still, while it lasted, that bewilderment of tumultuous pleasures was indeed intoxicating. The first artists, wits, and men of letters crowded my gilded saloons; even as, before and since, they beset the antechambers of royalty. Among others, Talleyrand, the cynical ex-bishop and high-bred future prince, was my frequent companion; and in our luxurious seclusion, what epigrams did we not vent upon the servilities of the human race; what blasphemies against all creeds and faiths, save that of the Golden Calf!

"Amid this chaos of political and moral disorganization, arose the Consulate and Napoleon. I took little heed of politics. An avowed Epicurean, I cared only for peace or war as an obstacle or facilitation to my pleasures; and though war becomes a bitter penalty in barren England, compelled to seek from the Continent her accessories of sensual enjoyment, self-sufficing, fertile, joyous France looks upon the closing of her ports without anxiety. I rejoiced among the rest, however, when Consular negotiation brought about a cessation of hostilities between the rival countries; for it filled me with glorious hopes to witness the arrival of those shoals of English travellers who never fail to rush to Paris, when occasion serves for flinging aside their pall of national gloom.

"What triumph to deny them access to my house!—What delight to tantalize them with exclusion from the brilliant hospitalities of the wealthy Spaniard!—For I was now redeemed from one species of obloquy; in Paris, religion had ceased to obtain mention from lips polite. Osalez the Jew was neither more nor less to them than Osalez the Gheber; and, whether I worshipped the God of Christians, or the god Fo, was a matter of indifference to those who quaffed my Sillery and tasted my Salmis. Even the name of Osalez had, however, become so distasteful to me, from its con-

nexion with my misfortunes, that, from the moment of settling in Paris, I assumed that of Clerval, derived from the estate I had purchased on my naturalization.

"Even as I had predicted, scarcely were the fêtes given for the celebration of the Peace of Amiens (of which those of the Hôtel de Clerval were by far the most gorgeous) at an end, when I was beset with applications from English aristocrats aspiring to the honour of my acquaintance, and access to my gallery and table. Having visited Paris to amuse themselves, they seemed to care little at whose cost they were amused.

"With the exception of a few inquiring tourists, and still fewer families residing abroad for purposes of economical education, English residents on the Continent are rarely persons of real merit or distinction. Spendthrift lords, flying before the face of their creditors, or *roué* lords, recreating themselves with lawless indulgences which England has denounced as infamous, constitute the chief frequenters of foreign society. For the transitory indulgence of their pleasures in a strange country, such men care not with whom they associate, or to what they have recourse to obtain means of diversion.

"Among these, I had no fear of recognition. The burning sun of the East, and the habits of a luxurious satrap, had so thoroughly effaced from my features all trace of the boy-member whom their levity had formerly coughed down, as to place an irreconcilable incongruity between the presumptuous Jew of Cadiz and Clerval the millionary. I was accounted in Paris the finest of fine gentlemen.

"On the other hand, my enormous wealth constituted a rock, against which innumerable shallow vessels, launched upon the deceptious sea of Pleasure by fool-hardy London, were successively split to pieces. Wherever they attempted competition with the opulent Clerval, whether as regarded financial speculation or the briefer madness of the gaming-table, ruin ensued. I retained my prodigious funds in a floating and tangible form; nor was it by means of mortgages or annuities I had to meet the pretensions of the enervate lordlings who presumed to confront me in my path, instead of treading at an humble distance in my footsteps. What chance, therefore, I entreat you, had the empty fops, whose capital was contained in the embroidered note-book in their waistcoat-pockets, against one who, in the days when Rothschilds were not, was able to influence, by his financial operations, half the money-markets in Europe?

"Among the first who fell a prey to my strength of courage and purse at the gaming-table was the husband of the elder of those insolent sisters of the object of my affection, by whose malice my early hopes had been so cruelly blighted. Lord Willesden (suffer me to conceal, under that designation, the title of my victim,) was one of those self-sufficient profligates who, on the pavement of St. James's-street, acquire the authority of a potentate. Arriving in Paris with Charles Fox, insolent with the favour of Carlton House, the London puppy affected the same air of defiance when dining at Legacq's, or the Pavillon de Hanovre, to which, in his

own country, his recognised position lent some colour. For a time, he affected to brave the man he could not aspire to surpass;—nor was it till he had lost five thousand livres to me on parole, that he was forced to recognise my superiority.

"Heartbroken by his system of profligacy, Lady Willesden was now a confirmed invalid, and rarely quitted her hotel. We had, consequently, never met; whereas her lord was my constant associate.

"Six weeks after his arrival in Paris, Lord Willesden was a ruined man,—ruined beyond hope,—beyond redemption! His estates, his houses, his plate, his jewels, were pledged to those to whom I furnished the funds destined to flow back, a refluent Pactolus, into my golden coffers. Hazard and roulette had made the haughty aristocrat my slave. My foot was upon his neck, and upon the neck of his children's children.

"At that period, Basil, I was stern of heart as some devastating monster of antiquity. Cruelty was my luxury,—revenge my pride; and those who had 'spat upon my Jewish gaberdine,' were making heavy atonement for the fault. I now trampled upon them in my turn. Talk of a bed of roses, Basil Annesley? Commend *me* to the couch whose pillows are inflated by the swelling sighs of a prostrate enemy;—to the slumbers soothed by the murmurs of—"

He paused. An involuntary shudder betraying the disgust of his companion had startled him into silence. But it was too late. The innate prejudice, long dormant in the soul of Basil, involuntarily retraced these workings of malice to the Jewish origin of Osalez. For the first time, the young man beheld in his companion a legitimate descendant of the tribe who drove nails into the hands and feet, and pierced the side, of the meek Jesus!

So forcibly was this feeling of estrangement depicted in the countenance of the young man, that, in resuming his narrative, Abednego hazarded no further reference to the animosities by which his vengeance had been actuated.

"Suffice it," he resumed, in a milder tone, "that, while realising in the more refined West the warm imaginings of a luxurious Oriental, I did not lose sight of those still profounder passions and keener anticipations, engendered by the cold-blooded persecutions of English pride.

"Lord Willesden had become my puppet. The fastidious London coxcomb moved only at my beck and bidding. But though he was my daily guest, sometimes at my brilliant hotel, sometimes at my princely country seat, I scrupulously abstained from entering his doors. My pretext for declining his invitation was the infirm health of Lady Willesden, and a disinclination to intrude upon the sacred domesticity of an invalid fireside; by which means, I contrived to excite an interest in my favour in the mind of the afflicted wife. My indulgence as a creditor, and liberality as an associate, as yet prevented all rumour of her husband's new follies from reaching her ears; and hearing of Monsieur de Clerval only as a hospitable host, a paragon of refinement courted in the best society, she felt grateful for the deference which kept him aloof from her impoverished seclusion.

"Though vain and dissolute, Willesden was fond of his wife, that is, fond of her after the selfish fashion of the egotist. It would have been a relief to him, had he left her behind him in England, to have suddenly received tidings of her decease. But he could not bear to *see* her suffer. Conscious of the injuries he was inflicting upon her and her children, he shrunk from the spectacle of her altered countenance. The more ill and enfeebled she became, the deeper he plunged into excesses that banished all recollection of his embittered home.

"One morning, he entered my breakfast-room earlier than usual, and began to execrate, in his ordinary strain, his ill-luck of the night before.

"'It is all Maria's fault,' cried he. 'The foolish woman fancies it disturbs her to hear the *porte cochère* open in the dead of night; and having exacted a promise from me not to remain out after three, last night, just as the luck began to turn in my favour, I was forced to quit the table. But *n'importe!*—my matrimonial prospects are brightening. Next week, I shall be at liberty to observe the sun rise where and how I please. My wife's sister is coming over from England to nurse her. Maria has been dispatching, I suspect, such doleful accounts of my neglects, that her family consider it necessary she should be better cared for.'

"Judge, Basil, how the blood, which for a moment had receded to my heart, rushed anew to my face when Lord Willesden, in answer to my almost breathless inquiries, acquainted me with the *name* of his expected visitant!

"Yes! It was herself. It was the object of my first and only attachment. The husband, I thanked Heaven, was not to bear her company, his military duties rendering it impossible for him to leave England. She was to come alone, as the affectionate attendant of her dying sister.

"Never shall I forget the tumultuous nature of my feelings during the remainder of the day. The ground appeared unsteady under my feet; the atmosphere too light to satisfy my respiration. I scarcely knew how to meet the singular occasion that presented itself for the gratification of the hungry vengeance I had been cherishing.

"A few more days, and she arrived. With assumed carelessness, I proceeded to question Lord Willesden concerning his sister-in-law; and with apparent indifference heard that she had been wedded against her will, and was a repining wife and unexulting mother.

"'Thank Heaven,' was Willesden's concluding phrase, 'she will be content to devote herself to the sick-room. Though still in the prime of life, poor soul, the world has ceased to attract her. So long as she can be induced to remain here therefore, I am at liberty to divert myself to my heart's content.'

"From that moment, my influence over Willesden was exercised with wholly different views. Affecting deep compassion for the position in which he had placed his children, I was constantly preaching reformation. Aware of the feebleness of his nature, I was certain that every time his fair sister-in-law pleaded the cause of his injured family, he would exclaim, 'You are almost as g-

a bore as Clerval. Just such are the arguments my friend is perpetually using.'

"I was observant, nevertheless, while figuring in the novel character of a Mentor, not to neglect the care of my reputation as a man of gallantry. The sick-room of Lady Willesden was frequented by the Duchess of Gordon, and half-a-dozen other Englishwomen of rank, who glittered in the gay world of Paris during the brief cessation of hostilities between the two countries; and I spared no pains to render my name a constant topic of discussion in their fastidious circle.

"Never had fêtes excited so supreme a sensation as those which I devised to dazzle the eyes of my unsuspecting country-women. Never was exclusiveness so insolent as that which I affected concerning their admittance within my gates. Sometimes, those gates unclosed for the diversion of hundreds of guests, who were fêted with the prodigality and fancifulness of some Arabian tale. Sometimes, the number of the favoured was limited to a single fortunate group, and not a syllable allowed to transpire of the nature of the entertainment; till, like Louis XIV., I was honoured by the frivolous beauties of the day with the name of 'The Enchanter.'

"My object was speedily accomplished. I learnt from Willesden that my peculiarities excited considerable curiosity in his family circle.

"'Lady Willesden seems revived as by a miracle, by her sister's arrival,' said he one day, as we were dashing back to Paris from the Château de Clerval, at the utmost speed of a set of fine English horses, to be in time for the opera; and the first symptom of her reviving health is inquisitiveness about yourself. These women want to make your acquaintance, Clerval. When will you come and dine with me?'

"With sudden reserve, I pleaded old-standing engagements for a fortnight to come; and Willesden being perfectly aware that many of these were of my own creation, the sensitiveness of an embarrassed man attributed my reluctance to join his circle to the distress of his fireside, and the defects of an unaccomplished cook.

"'I am aware,' he retorted, 'that I have nothing to attract an Amphytrion like yourself. Nor should I have presumed to invite so exquisite a gastronome, to fast at my humble board, but for the importunity of my sister-in-law to make your acquaintance. Your munificence as a patron of the arts (of which she has taken it into her flighty head to become a votary, to console herself, I suppose, for disappointment of the affections) has strangely excited her interest in your favour.'

"I bowed and smiled, but made no move towards conciliating the wish thus intimated. On the contrary, the plainer his hints, the more resolutely did I keep aloof. At length, alarmed lest he might estrange me from himself by further pertinacity, Lord Willesden desisted; and my firmness served only to augment the restless curiosity of those against whose peace my manœuvres were directed.

"Meanwhile, I had seen her again. From my box at the opera,

and in the public promenades, I had beheld the object still and ever dearest to my heart; and the sight did but still further stimulate my projects of vengeance. She had now attained the full maturity of womanly charms. The lovely girl of eighteen had become the beautiful and commanding woman of thirty. *How* beautiful, the admiration she attracted, whenever seen by glimpses in the society of Paris, sufficiently attested; *how* beautiful, the tumults of my own distracted heart, as I hurried on such occasions from her presence, afforded a far more painful proof. Unrestrained in all other pursuits and inclinations, the caution and self-control I was forced to observe in *this*, served only to augment the force of my passion. I was becoming madly and desperately in love; far more desperately than when, with the purer fervour of boyhood, I wooed her to become my bride.

"I appreciated too highly, Basil, the gentle nature of that beloved being, to suppose it possible the mere dazzlements of vanity would suffice for her captivation. I knew that she must respect the man, as well as admire the patron, before the brilliant Clerval created any serious impression on her feelings. To effect this, I contrived that, in all her little acts of charity, my name should be beforehand with hers in the exercise of benevolence. She could not extend her hand to the orphan or the widow, but mine had been already outstretched.

"Many of these instances were mere clap-traps, got up to attract her notice. By the aid of money, Basil, *anything* may be manufactured to order, even 'cases of extreme distress;' and little did that humane woman suspect that the wants she fancied herself to be relieving were as much an effort of art as the scenery of the Grand Opera!"

"I scarcely conceive, sir," suddenly interrupted Basil Annesley, "the advantage likely to arise to either of us from these confidences. If an effusion of penitence, it is not for me to grant you absolution. If a matter of vaunt, I entreat you to refrain from avowals which are gradually exciting my disgust."

"Hear me to an end," cried Abednego. "I address you neither in a tone of boastfulness nor of whining remorse; but as a man having wrestled hand to hand with the sorest temptations, willing to impart to one he dearly loves the fatally-earned fruits of his experience.

"All I can do in deference to your scruples, is to pass over briefly the snares with which I encompassed the path of my victim: sometimes hoping, oftener despairing of success. But if unable a second time to conquer her affections, I was resolved at least to humble her pride.

"Spring was in its prime, when I announced one of those gorgeous entertainments, which used to set the fashionable world of Paris into commotion. It was to be a daylight fête at my château on the Seine; and a flotilla of Venetian barges, long in preparation, was launched for the purpose of conveying my guests to the landing stairs. It was speedily rumoured among the invited, that not a single English person was to be included among the guests of Monsieur de Clerval; and though Willesden, my constant com-

panion, flattered himself that, as a matter of course, an exception would be made in his favour, I took an early opportunity to inform him that, having an especial object for my *Fêtes des Lilacs*, I was forced to exclude him among the rest of the English pretendants.

"Though evidently nettled by my communication, Willesden was too deeply my debtor to hazard a syllable of remonstrance. Attributing the word 'object' to some reigning lady of my thoughts, he ventured to banter me concerning the mysterious *liaison* demanding such vast concessions; and I replied in terms of romantic gallantry, which, I justly surmised, would be repeated by his fire-side, and serve only to excite new interest in my favour.

"Without intending it, Willesden was constantly betraying to me the fruition of my schemes. While informing me how often he was forced to become my champion with his wife and sister, his silly vanity exposed far more than he intended. He did not disguise from me how grievously his lovely guest was mortified to find herself excluded from the only house in Paris she had the slightest curiosity to enter.

"I looked grave; and when Lord Willesden again approached the subject, abstained wholly from his society. Nay, if we met, by chance, in the Bois de Boulogne, I assumed so cold and louring a countenance, that the poor man was terrified by the wrath he had provoked.

"The amount of I O U's, and bonds, bearing his signature, in my strong box, rendered it unsafe for him to give offence to one so potential. Abednego the Jew had reduced the insolent English peer to the most abject subservience.

"By degrees, he was compelled to assume a still viler attitude. The embarrassment of his affairs rendered a further levy of money indispensable; and not a banker could be found to assist him. But I had so often obliged him, and had of late assumed so forbidding a countenance, that to *me* he dared not apply; nor was it till the humiliation of finding his wife and guest on the eve of becoming homeless, drove him to the application, that he once more addressed me in the subdued tone of a suppliant.

"Before the request had half escaped his lips it was granted. Nay, the amount of the loan he desired was trebled, and forced upon him, till, in the exuberance of his gratitude, Lord Willesden would, I verily believe, have subscribed to *any* terms his creditor saw fit to propose.

"'Do not perplex yourself about such a trifle,' said I, 'I am only too happy to assist you. If you wish, my dear Willesden, to oblige me in your turn, all I have to ask is, that you will admit me, as a friend, into your family circle, in spite of any remonstrances that may be addressed to you by Lady Willesden and her sister.'

"'Remonstrances?' repeated the astonished Willesden. 'Why, I have been hinting to you for the last week the earnest desire of the latter to make your acquaintance.'

"'The lady's good intentions may subside after she has seen me. Besides, I shall not be satisfied with the concessions of mere acquaintanceship. The object of my ambition is, to stand preeminent in her favour.'

"'In that case, my dear Clerval, I cannot flatter you with much prospect of success,' replied Willesden, somewhat embarrassed. 'Though unhappy in her marriage, she is incapable of losing sight of her duties as a wife and mother.'

"'Of course!—*All* English ladies are so rigid in their principles —so correct in their conduct, that one cannot but wonder how such libels as divorce bills are suffered to go unpunished.'

"'I am not vaunting the virtue of my sister-in-law,' replied Lord Willesden, the blood mantling in his sallow cheek convincing me that nothing but his obligations towards me prevented him from knocking me down. 'She has no heart to bestow. In early life she formed a low connexion; the influence of which, my poor wife assures me, she has never been able to throw off.'

"It was now my turn to flush with anger. The insolence of the noble insolvent confirmed me in my evil projects.

"'No one is able to calculate upon the caprices and fantasticalities of woman's nature,' said I. 'All I ask of you is a solemn promise that, whatever ungraciousness may be testified towards me by Lady Willesden and her sister, you will not deny me access to your house.'

"'Deny you access?' cried his lordship. 'You, my best friend, my benefactor. You, who throughout the winter I have been courting as a guest?—Absurd!'

"'Absurd, perhaps. But having hitherto resisted your invitations, I will not even now accept them, unless under a written guarantee that my welcome is secured.'

"After the numberless obligations he had signed in my favour, this appeared a trifling concession; and laughing heartily at my squeamishness, Lord Willesden entered readily into what appeared to be a joke, by drawing up a paper ensuring me access to his house at all hours, and under all possible circumstances.

"I conclude that, with certain modifications, he announced my sudden caprice to his wife. For I had reason to know that my visit was expected and prepared for. I chose, however, to be expected in vain!

"Nearly a month passed; and Willesden must have attributed the wayward conditions I had dictated to some momentary whim; for, so far from availing myself of the permission I had extorted, I abstained from associating even with himself. Curiosity and interest were, accordingly, excited to the strongest in his family circle, concerning the man whose movements were erratic as those of a meteor; and on my announcing a second summer entertainment at my château, *La fête des Roses*, with similar restrictions as to the English, with the single exception of Lord Willesden's family, I rightly conjectured that my invitation would be accepted with gratitude.

"Money forms the magic of our epoch. But Paris, above all other places, affords an auspicious field for the exercise of its fairy wand. Resolved that the last fête of the mysterious Clerval should excel all his previous efforts, I was ably seconded by the genius of that new *renaissance des arts*, fostered under the auspices of the Consulate.

"But the enormous outlay which afforded ample occupation to the wonderers of the great world, was produced less by the splendour of the entertainment than by my conceit of producing, on the banks of the Seine, an exact reduplication of those well-remembered gardens of Cadiz, the scene of the happiest moments of my life. The illusion was complete. Tree for tree,—arbour for arbour,—the spot which had witnessed my midnight interviews with *her*, was reproduced for the occasion.

"It was *there*, Basil, I received her! It was *there* I advanced to welcome that repining wife, when, in all the exuberance of matronly beauty and leaning on the arm of her brother-in-law, she beheld before her the injured lover of her youth."

CHAPTER XX.

A poor, weak woman!
Ay, take up the phrase, ye babbling thousands,
From century to century!—Woman's weakness
The pigmy man hath scope of intellect
To measure!—But by what expanded powers,
What newly kindled energies of soul,
Shall he attain the power to estimate
Her strength,—her truth,—the greatness of her virtue?
When strong, and true, and great, no living thing
Great, true, and strong as she! AKENSIDE.

"In the perversity of my heart, Basil Annesley, I anticipated with confidence the success of my projects. The humiliations of former days were effaced by a series of triumphs. Everything, of late, had prospered with me; and long accustomed to the adoration of the vain and interested, I doubted not that the woman described as a 'repining wife,' would be content to atone for all I had undergone for her sake.

"But while triumphing in the strength of our vices, we are apt to calculate too largely on the weakness of others. Whether as the arbitrary voluptuary of the East, or the corrupt Epicurean of Paris, my experience had not prepared me for the integrity of heart,—the self-respect,—the womanly purity,—the feminine pride,—arrayed against my pretensions. She not only resented the manœuvres by which she had been betrayed into my presence, but rejected, as an insult, my protestations of unaltered attachment.

"Had I approached her in a less presumptuous guise,—had I appeared before her poor,—humble,—friendless,—the promptings of her heart might have stood my friend. But she despised the ostentatious man who stood before her as a conqueror. Her clear understanding, her upright purposes, were not to be baffled by my shallow intrigues; and the net in which my subtlety had entangled her shallow brother-in-law was unable to enfold her in its meshes.

"I have not courage to recite the opprobrious terms in which she manifested her insight into my views and character.

"'My father and family judged wisely,' said she; 'and I now admit that I was blinded to your real character by partial affection. The penalty invoked by the blaspheming Jews upon themselves and their children's children, has converted you,—even you, Osalez,—into an idolater of Mammon! You have attempted to dazzle, by gorgeous prodigality, the heart that might have been moved to seek you out in penury or affliction. My father was right. There exists no sympathy between us.'

"Judge of my indignation,—judge of my despair, on hearing this bitter condemnation! When she withdrew in all the dignity of wounded pride from my presence, I felt that the whole aim of my existence was frustrated!

"For two following days, I shut myself up in surly desperation. On the third, I emerged from my solitude, with the amended purpose of imploring forgiveness, and offering atonement. She was gone. She had quitted Paris. Mistrusting the protection of her brother-in-law, she was on her road to England,—to the safe keeping of an honourable husband.

"'My unfortunate sister is the companion of my inauspicious journey,' said the letter she addressed to me from Dover. 'Should the effort prove too much for her declining health, it is *you* who will have sentenced her to death. Apprised by Lord Willesden of his insolvency and the ruin of her innocent children, she had not courage to abide, in a strange land, the penalty likely to be enforced by a nature ruthless as yours. Her husband remains behind to answer you with his person. Do your worst. If you *dare*, render Lord Willesden your prisoner, as he is already your dupe!'"

"But you did *not* dare!" interrupted Basil Annesley, whose mind appeared suddenly relieved from some terrible apprehension. "You had not courage to inflict a further injury on this noble-minded woman?"

"You say truly. I *had* not. But others were more relentless. Some months after her return to England, slanderous tongues announced to her husband that my flagitious scheming had prospered. As I live and breathe, Basil, I had no share in the tale of scandal. It was the diabolical invention of some enemy. Yet groundless as it was, it drove the unhappy man into the grave!

"He perished, Basil Annesley, at the head of his regiment, on the field of honour; but it was with the cruel conviction that his wife was an adulteress, and his unborn child the offspring of shame.—Unhappy woman.—To be cursed with a husband and a lover alike incapable of appreciating the virtue of her soul.

"The poor atonement in my power to offer, was not withheld. But far more contumeliously than even her father had rejected me, did she decline the offer of my hand. Regarding me as the assassin of her brother, the murderer of her husband, she spurned me from her presence. She spoke of her duty towards her children.—*Her children!* The girl had been by its father's will, already withdrawn from her protection. The boy—the innocent boy now nestling in her bosom—had been rejected by him as the offspring of crime.—Basil—Basil!—Why did not your little hands upraise themselves to intercede in my behalf!"

"My presentiments, then, have not deceived me!" cried the young man, starting from his seat. "It is, indeed, my dear and unfortunate mother who has been through life your victim!"

"My *victim*? There was no earthly sacrifice I would not have made to obtain permission to become the humblest slave of her household. My *victim!* No, no, I was hers. Maddened by her indifference, her abhorrence, I rushed into the most frantic excesses. I flew to the gaming-table. The cold, calculating Clerval played, for once, like a child.

"My lucky star deserted me. My long-boasted opulence was gradually melting away. Even the securities I held in pledge from Willesden, were at length staked and lost, and gained by those who did not hesitate to expose him to reprisals, attributed by his unfortunate wife and family to myself.

"On the brink of ruin, I looked around me for some desperate chance whereby to retrieve my fortunes, or achieve an honourable death. War was raging in Germany, and I joined the army of the Sambre and Meuse as a volunteer. By degrees my heart warmed to the standard under which I had enlisted. All other pains and pleasures exhausted, the excitement arising from a military career was a bewildering novelty; and as a means of inflicting humiliation on a country allied with my natural enemies, I embarked all the energies of my nature in the cause of the Eagle of France.

"Like all other men in earnest in their profession during the supremacy of Napoleon, advancement followed. I was speedily rewarded by a commission. I was promised further promotion. But my military career was destined to a cruel interruption.

"In traversing Heidelberg, in the course of my campaign, remembering it to be the birthplace of Verelst, I took occasion to make such inquiries respecting the condition of my sister as proved that her letters addressed to my father, intimating her miserable destitution, conveyed no exaggerated picture of poor Rachael's fallen fortunes.

"Pampered by prosperity, the stubbornness of cruelty was still rampant within me; for the evil practised against myself had taken root in my soul, and was bringing forth bitter fruits. Having sworn never to behold her more, I made it a virtue to adhere to my oath; and though moved to alleviate her misfortunes, bestowed my humble gift upon her in the shape of alms from a stranger, rather than as an offering of brotherly love.

"The jealous feelings of Verelst took alarm. He pursued the Capitaine de Clerval who had presumed to send a gift of money to his lovely wife. But the artist's application for an audience having been answered by an insult, the indignant man waylaid my coming forth, and rewarded my insolence with a blow.

"In the intemperance of the moment I drew my sword, rushed upon him, would fain have fought him—have killed him! But no more than a slight wound had signalized my frenzy. I was seized and placed in arrest. Imperial discipline was rigorous on such points; and I, so lately the man of millions, might possibly have been shot like a dog, after a hasty court-martial, had not Verelst come forward with attestations of—Guess on what plea the fool pretended to preserve my life—Guess!"

Basil Annesley shrugged his shoulders in intimation of ignorance.

"*Insanity!*—And his wife being my nearest of kin, his attestations were received with deference. While I stood by, in custody, and listened, the fellow presumed to swear before my face that, for some years past, my conduct had been indicative of aberration of intellect.

"It is true his absurd depositions saved my life. But at what a cost:—to be sent back to Paris under escort, as a lunatic. To be deposited in Charenton, till the physicians decided upon my case! In the irritation of all I had to undergo, I accused Verelst and my sister of getting me shut up for life, with a view to obtain the administration of my remaining property."

"Verelst is as incapable of such an act of baseness as the first noble in the land!" cried Basil, with warm indignation.

"I agree with you, now that I judge the case dispassionately. But wait, young gentleman, till you have been seized and manacled, till you have had your head shaved, and been starved and douched at the caprice of an experimentalizing apothecary, to judge equitably of the motives of your incarcerator!" said Osalez, with a shudder. "Had my poor brother-in-law entered my cell at Charenton, I am convinced I should have throttled him on the spot.

"There, however, Basil, there as elsewhere, gold proved my sword and my buckler. One of the visiting surgeons was a shrewd man, who soon saw through the nature of my malady and position; and when he proposed confederacy, I drove no hard bargain in assigning the sum for which he was to get me placed in a Maison de Santé, as partly convalescent; and, in process of time, pronounce me cured, and obtain my enlargement.

"It was during that gloomy interval of imprisonment, Basil, that my nature became thoroughly desophisticated. I learnt, by hard authority, with how many of the so-styled necessaries of human life, human nature is able to dispense. I soon found myself the happier for lacking menial attendance. My greatest luxury was to be alone.

"Within the four bare walls of my cell, the expansion of my glowing mind supplied all the splendours of the east. I carried my paradise within me. My dreams were now of the gardens of Gulistan, or the white walls of Cadiz, and lo! I said unto my soul, what need of costly tapestries, what need of vessels of gold or vessels of silver, what need of the toys of art, the marble of the sculptor, the canvas of the painter, since abiding here in solitary self-contemplation, I am as much in enjoyment of these things as when long use and habit rendered them inostensible under the roof of my stately Spanish palace or Parisian villa. Compulsory starvation, compulsory vigils, compulsory self-attendance, soon blunted the edge of the most cutting hardships. From that period, I became master of myself, and doubly the master of other people.

"Not to weary you with details, suffice it that I was eventually restored to freedom. But instead of profiting by my liberty to resume the enervate habits of life which four years of thraldom had rendered irksome, I devoted myself solely and exclusively to the worship of Mammon. I resolved to punish my brother-in-law by

all the tortures of poverty, while millions were amassing in my coffers; and eventually bequeath them to some public charity or national foundation, while my kindred were begging their bread, and the woman who had cast me from her was exposed to the bitterness of want! There was ecstasy in these projects of vengeance. Yes—ecstasy! If God have reserved to himself the dealing of vengeance, is it not because it is a pleasure worthy the immortals?"

"You deceive yourself, Mr. Osalez!" remonstrated Basil; "or you would deceive *me*. Deal frankly with both, and you will own that you experienced dearer delight last night, in your reconciliation with those nearest to you in blood, than ever presented itself to your enjoyment in the course of your projects of retribution."

The silence of Abednego conceded tacit assent to this proposition. But he contented himself by replying evasively. "If I resorted to the joys of revenge to keep alive the lazy current of my blood, what else had they left me? England had closed against me the lists of fair and honourable ambition, and through *them*, access to the joys of domestic life. Society had driven me like a dog from its gates. What wonder that the helpless brute, thus spurned, should become rabid and snarl, and turn upon his persecutors? My consolation lay in the procreation of wealth. GOLD became my wife,—my child,—my kith,—my kin. No labour was too great—no humiliation too abject for its acquirement. The filthiest mud seemed not to defile my fingers, in which I discerned a single glittering particle. Perhaps you will accuse these instincts as characteristic of my Jewish origin? No, Basil! They were not *in* me when I wandered with *her* among the orange groves of Cadiz;—they were not *in* me when howled by fools and bigots out of the House of Commons! They were cravings—morbid cravings—engendered by that gnawing famine of the soul to which I was scornfully condemned by my fellow-men.

"The pursuit of wealth became a pastime rather than a toil. I delighted in the cunning disguises by which I attempted to penetrate the motives, and overmaster the destinies, of my clients. Most men are fond of stage playing, if they would but own it; some in their amateur theatres,—some on the velvet foot-cloths of a court,—some in a pulpit,—some in the rostrum,—some on the wool-sack,—some on the Bench of Bishops—I, in Paulet-street, St. Agnes-le-Clare.

"I was as proud of the dramatic genius which enabled me to go, like the wind, hither and thither where I listed, as a judge after delivering a pathetic charge, or the rector or chancellor of a university when playing the bigwig for the be-wonderment of dunces. I had my rat-holes, in which to chaffer with my Jewish confraternity. I had my counting-houses, and tables of the money-changers for those having a fairer footing in the Temple of Mammon; and lastly, I had a decent home wherein to treat with the great capitalists of the day, so as to induce their belief in my non-exemption from the ordinary tastes and appetites of mortal nature. I saw that, by standing too far aloof from the sinful lusts of the flesh, the pomps and vanities of life, I must pass for either saint or devil!

"These motley vicissitudes served to redeem existence from its monotony. I was alternately king and beggar; Richard in the tragedy, Abel Drugger in the farce. Gods! how have I laughed in my sleeve at the dupehood of the world! What puppets were the great in my hands, what tools the powerful! Exquisite, indeed, was the triumph of watching the manœuvres of those who treated me as an engine, and were the while mere implements in my hands.

"In Paris, among the wits and philosophers of that unquiet time which gloried in the scepticism of all human virtue, how often had I indulged in speculations touching the mysteries of the human heart, which I now possessed means and opportunities of putting to the proof. I doubt whether any living mortal ever enjoyed occasions such as mine, of searching into the darker recesses of our nature. I have watched the corruption generated by prosperity; I have watched the corruption generated by adversity. Each has its specific gangrene, its peculiar and distinctive loathsomeness; and it may be doubted whether the sores of Lazarus or those of Dives, be vilest in the sight of the Almighty Judge of human infirmities.

"You, my dear child, have seen more since your connexion with myself, than other young men of your caste, of the influence of prodigality on human character. But what *you* have witnessed is a speck of dust by comparison with the basenesses that have fallen under my observation. Among my millionary colleagues and starving clients, I have examined the influence of money upon the soul, till I shuddered at the results of my scrutiny! Like the Indian nut which generates so subtle a vapour that, when forming part of a freight, it penetrates into the innermost recesses of every case and package in the ship, reducing the contents to rags and decay, the influence of GOLD corrupts all that is pure, and attenuates all that is solid in the human mind. It is a touchstone I tremble to apply to a character in whose stability my affections are interested. For the sake of gain, I have seen brother renounce brother, I have seen friend forsake friend, I have known parents, in their hour of need, betray the interests of their children, I have known children lose all sight of the feelings of their parents. Woman, Basil, woman, who was evidently intended by her Creator as the nearest approach to the angelic beings of a happier sphere, becomes worse than earthly—worse than fiendish—the moment the demoniacal appetite for gold gains the ascendancy over her faculties. I swear to you, my dear Basil, that were my affections pledged to the most beautiful of her sex, to discover her telling over a sum of money with the greedy eye of avarice, would as effectually revolt my feelings, as to find her fair frame distorted by some incurable distemper.

"Such were still my sentiments and occupations, Basil Annesley, till the period of our first encounter. But the moment a hand so young and stainless as yours poured oil into my wounds, new life was enkindled within me. I seemed to espy noble and undreamed of purposes in Money. When your interest in behalf of Verelst brought the exile of my sister to my knowledge, Mercy was dawn-

ing within me; and Peace brooded over her dove-like couplets in my heart.

"I visited the family in disguise. I learnt to love their virtues, admire their graces. I have less compunction, Basil, for having abandoned those lovely girls to the rough schooling of adversity; for it has left them good, true, generous, tender, all that the gilding of luxury destroys or disguises in the courtly bred. For worlds, I would not have their honest natures resemble the frippery do-nothingness of your friends the Maitlands. Nor would I have had them heartless and proud—like—*like her*;—for all the happiness of old age must arise from their gentle companionship.

"And now, Basil Annesley, (lest I see you again place your hand on your waistcoat-pocket in search of the toy by which your useless moments are admeasured,) I release you. I ask no opinion, no sentence, on what I have related. I see, by your altered countenance towards me, that a revolution has been effected in your mind. Be not over-hasty. Ponder over these things in your heart, and maturely weigh them ere we meet again."

Relieved by this intimation, the young soldier rose calmly and coldly from his seat, and glanced towards the panel by which he had accomplished his entrance.

"No need to sneak out thence," cried the old man, assuming a more cheerful tone. "I shall be proud to introduce you into another of my households." And throwing open the door of a dining-room, hung with masterpieces of the old masters, he conducted him through a handsome library into a snug dressing-room, where his well-brushed coat and hat, his handkerchief and gloves, formally set out, were awaiting him. Involuntarily, young Annesley shrugged his shoulders.

"You are thinking of Delahay-street, eh?" observed Osalez, with a smile. "To me both places are of the same account. My heart and soul are not empty enough to find room for petty wants,

'When the mind's free, the body's delicate.'

Should you ever acquire objects in life of the engrossing nature that absorb the attention of a great capitalist, you will cease to take thought of the softness of your couch, or flavour of your dishes. Yet why not do myself fuller justice in your eyes, by avowing that half the privations to which you have seen me expose myself, were acts of voluntary penance.

"Alas, Basil! if not a Jew, I merit, I own, the charge made by St. Paul, of being 'in all things too superstitious.' I incline much to sacrifices of atonement. That you sought and befriended me amid the wretchedness which appeared so real, seems intended by the Almighty as repayment for my self-inflicted tortures."

While buttoning on his coat, Osalez intimated to his visitor a desire to transport him in his carriage to the West end of the town.

"Still harping on your horse?" cried he, when his young visitor again excused himself. "Fear nothing. By my orders, Zebedee conveyed the beast back to your stables, half an hour ago."

"Why, you do not even know my stables," cried Basil, almost with indignation.

"I know all and everything that concerns you. And now, will you come back and dine with me quietly in Bernard-street?"

Already Basil had excused himself, while Osalez was about to step into a chariot awaiting him at the door of the handsome mansion, from the spacious hall of which they were emerging together, when an intimation that the Verelsts were already the inmates of their wealthy kinsman, induced him to pause. His scarcely audible mutterings about a change of dress were scouted by Abednego.

"How long have you been such a coxcomb?" cried he. "The last time you dined with me, you had not changed your dress. Why so much respect for the Verelsts? Have you not been the child of their house,—the friend of their fireside? At all events, come with me, and I will drop you when we reach Temple Bar."

"You have persuaded Verelst, then, to give up his engagements to the Marquis?" inquired Basil, as they drove at a rapid pace through the city.

"On the contrary, I never even attempted it. I appreciate too highly an artist's independence of mind. Let him distinguish himself,—immortalize himself, if he can. So much the better and happier for them all. The girls and their mother will reside with me during his absence in the North."

On arriving in Bernard-street (for, once installed in the carriage, Basil found it impossible to resist the old man's solicitations) young Annesley was as cheerfully welcomed by Mrs. Verelst and her daughters as ever he had been to their humble fireside, either at Heidelberg or in London.

"Ungrateful girl!" mused the young soldier, as he contemplated the open, radiant countenance of his beloved Esther. "Not a sympathizing care has she bestowed on the wretchedness she must know her present prospects to be creating."

And, sooth to say, Esther and Salome accosted their young friend as amiably and frankly as if there had been no Duca di San Catalda in the world.

"You have already officiated as my valet; let me now act as yours," cried Osalez, addressing Basil, and motioning to his pompous butler to lead the way to his dressing-room. "Dine with us, Basil, you must and shall. I have some Neckar wine which Verelst swears is superior to Hochheimer—(Lord Maitland, no doubt, has made you a judge of Hock!)—and which will open your heart and his, and carry you both back to your cordial days of old."

CHAPTER XXI.

Il est vrai que dans mon Avril, calme et sévère,
J'ai vu s'éteindre plus d'un chimère
Plein de douces choses ;—
Mais quoi ! me croyez vous assez fou pour rêver
L'éternité des roses ? VICTOR HUGO.

THE London season was now in process of revival. Like a young crocodile bursting from its egg, it was beginning to sun itself in the unprofitable waste of sand wherein its mischiefs are apportioned. The pavement of St. James's-street had re-gathered into a jabbering crowd its insolent population; and hackney-coaches began to rumble unnoticed amid the growing multiplicity of private equipages, dashing through the streets of the West-end.

Even old Carrington, at the commencement of his twentieth season about town, was beginning, like the old sooty trees in St. Paul's Church-yard, to put forth a few leaves and airs of rejuvenescence. New swarms, the produce of the old, were gathering in the club windows; and the cry for news, the habitual croak of the frogs swamped in the morass of fashionable dulness, was great in the land.

They had *done* with the "smash at Rochester-house." Let not the most prodigal of dukes presume to hope that his ruin will form more than a nine days' wonder. The Rochesters were gone abroad, and nobody so much as cared to know what was become of them. Every one had inquired to whom his Grace's French cook had engaged himself; and everybody ascertained *who* were the fortunate purchasers of his cellar of wines. What more could the fashionable world desire to hear about the matter?

Most welcome, therefore, to the gaping loungers of Crocky's was the hint in general circulation, that crash the first was about to be succeeded by crash the second; and that Lord Maitland was soon to follow the example of the Duke of Rochester, and leave forty thousand pounds' worth of plate and furniture to pay an aggregate of one hundred thousand of debts.

It is true some score or two of intimate friends had, on the break-up of the establishment in Arlington-street, had their dinner to seek elsewhere, twice or thrice a week. Still, this species of worldling is seldom of a calculating nature. In the present day of ostentation, so abundant are the manna and quails of fashionable prodigality, that it is almost more difficult to find guests for dinner-parties, than dinner-parties for guests. There is always some newly-inheriting blockhead, or ninny just come of age, to be sponged upon by the cormorants or hangers-on of the aristocracy.

On the whole, therefore, they were almost as well satisfied to have Lord Maitland's ruin to gossip about, as his claret to drink.

"It really only serves him right!" was the charitable summing-up of one who had been his co-mate in the Jockey Club and the House of Lords, ever since they arrived together at years of indiscretion. "Maitland used to call himself an unlucky fellow on the turf. Now, *unlucky* is a very plausible word for *blundering*.

When a man is 'unlucky' from year's end to year's end, without a chance of retrieving himself, he *must* know, or ought to know, that the bent of his genius does not lie that way. The turf, to make it answer, requires a man of superior mind. Many a Chancellor of the Exchequer would be puzzled to make up a book! And really it was poor Maitland's duty, as a family man, when he found himself the dupe of every stud-groom or trainer that came in his way, to adopt some other pursuit. Instead of which, look at his losses at Ascot, last year, at Epsom this, at Newmarket, every year of his life."

"Maitland was certainly as regularly *done* as a man could wish to be!" rejoined another, whose name was inscribed to the amount of some thousands in the registers of A. O. "But what can a man expect who gets into the hands of the Jews? To my certain knowledge, Maitland has been raising money for years, at the rate of ten, twenty, thirty per cent. What rent-roll can stand against that sort of thing? The moment one's cursed stewards find that money is an object, they throw such obstacles in one's way as to double the amount of interest clapped on by the Money-lenders. As to timber, Maitland Castle would be puzzled to furnish a broomstick!"

But of all the scoffers who jeered over the downfall of their hospitable entertainer, Carrington was the worst; inasmuch as the levity of a grey head is the worst of levities. When taxed by his brother officers with his attentions to Lucy Maitland, the old beau kept up the farce of youthful dandyism, by protesting that he had "*meant* nothing," and that it was no fault of his if the London girls made a dead set at a man, and then fancied the advances had proceeded from himself.

"I was not more at the Maitlands than twenty other fellows," said he, craning his long throat in his stock.

"But at *your* age, old boy," cried Wilberton, "You have no business to be doing what twenty other fellows are doing; you ought to be showing us an example, and mending our manners. For instance, it was nothing *my* going to Arlington-street, or Lady Maitland inviting me, because everybody knew it was only as a stop-gap. A younger brother—a butterfly like myself, passed in the house like the idle wind, which men regard not. While *you*, my dear Carr, you, with your comfortable little estate in Hampshire—Wiltshire (where the deuce is it,—no matter,) you, with your comfortable little estate and family mansion, cannot pay attention to a girl without seriously compromising either yourself or *her*. If I were John Maitland, I would call you out. We shall be having the poor girl in a deep decline, produced by the volatility of the Dowager Colonel!"

It was partly under the influence of this bantering, and partly for the gratification of his inordinate curiosity, that Carrington consented to accompany Wilberton to Arlington-street.

"It will be but decent," said both, "if we leave a card of compliment before these people go out of town."

But Lady Maitland was one of those who both preach and practise the doctrine of putting a good face upon the worst of matters.

Lest any shyness on *her* part should seem to confirm the unpleasant rumours in circulation concerning the family, she chose to receive morning visitors up to the very day of resigning the family mansion to the new tenants; and while the two girls sat, nervous and out of spirits, fully aware of the ruin of at least *their* prospects in life, she continued to assign the most plausible pretexts for absenting themselves from town at the commencement of the season.

"It is rather hard on Lucy and her sister, to carry them off just as the gaieties are beginning," said she. "But these physicians are so peremptory! They assure us that Kissingen will be of no sort of service to Lord Maitland's gout, unless he begins the waters in the month of June."

"I understood," observed the Dowager Colonel,—who always "understood" best the things concerning which people wished to keep him in the dark,—"that Lord Maitland was to remain at Mivart's till the close of the session, and *then* join your ladyship at Wiesbaden, or Kissingen, or wherever it may be?"

"Certainly," replied Lady Maitland,—in some confusion,—"certainly,—certainly. But it is necessary that *we* should be on the spot early to secure proper accommodation for the family. In those kind of places, if you arrive late, you get the worst apartments of the worst hotel at the dearest rate. The Russians monopolize everything!"

In order to avoid the stare of incredulity manifested in the disagreeable countenance of Old Carrington, her ladyship began to talk about the charming rococo shops she was assured she should find at Rotterdam; and an exquisite fan which some curiosity-hunting countess of her acquaintance had picked up among the the Dutch Jews on the quays of that amphibious city.

All she could do perforce of hypocrisy was done to give to her enforced exile the air of a party of pleasure; and Lucy Maitland, who had hailed with delight the arrival of two of her brother's friends, in hopes they might let fall tidings of Basil Annesley, felt ashamed of the adroit disingenuousness with which she heard her mother varnish over their retreat.

Young Wilberton, who was really good-natured, took pains to appear convinced they were making an amiable personal sacrifice to the health of the head of the family; and when, on some allusion to a change in the distribution of the morning-room, produced by the removal of certain family pictures and the musical instruments of the girls, which had been sent down to Maitland Castle, he saw tears come into the eyes of Lucy and her sister, felt too sincerely sorry for them not to put a speedy term to his visit.

"If you should see Mr. Annesley," stammered Lucy Maitland, as she extended her parting hand towards him, "tell him how much we regretted not to have wished him good bye, previous to our departure from England. I trust we shall often hear through my brother of his welfare."

Such was the clinging to a vain illusion, with which the poor girl comforted herself in quitting England for her mortifying exile; and such are the constant results of the injudicious system of familiarity maintained in England among young people, at the period of life when a look,—a word—may produce a fatal bias in

the affections. For what can be hoped from the perspicacity of seventeen in ascertaining whether the attentions of an ingratiating companion are the mere result of accident and good humour, or of serious preference?

For the last two years, the Maitland girls had received from the knot of young men frequenting their father's house, attentions such as, in any other country but England, are paid only on the eve of marriage. Yet not one of these men of wit and pleasure about town but would have resented as an injury any insinuation that the ruined family had peculiar claims on their devotion. Even the popularity of the Maitlands had vanished with their father's excellent bills of fare; and had they *now* required a friendly arm to assist them through the crush-room at the opera, or call up their carriage in the crowd, it was only some *very* young ensign who was likely to present himself for the duty.

But the conduct which, in such men as Blencowe and Loftus, arose from utter heartlessness, had been in Basil Annesley the consequence of pre-occupied feelings and modest self-estimation. It had always seemed impossible to *him* that any homage *he* could show to any living woman was likely to engage her affections; least of all, the vain, showy Maitlands, apparently so wedded to the superficialities of life. Moreover, his attachment to Esther Verelst had been from the first of so absorbing a nature, as to render him wholly uncognizant of the susceptibilities of other women. He had frequented the Maitlands' house like all the rest of John Maitland's friends; and treated the ladies he found there with the utmost deference; but, more as belonging to the sex of his beloved mother and adored Esther, than for any charm he discovered in their affected prettiness and flippant gossip.

At the moment such tender parting messages were despatched to him by the mistaken Lucy, he was seated between Mrs. Verelst and her daughter, under that hospitable roof where he had very little expected ever to find guests so completely to his taste. Instead of the jargon of stockbrokers, and the lingo of bullion merchants, the table of Osalez was now cheered by a thousand affectionate references to past pleasures and early enjoyments. The brother and sister, with mutual consideration, seemed to overlook the lapse of the last painful and trying twenty years of their existence, in order to recur to the brighter season of their youth; to the happy girlhood of Rachael ere her brother had loved or suffered; to the boyhood of Osalez, ere he conceived it possible that he should live to become the persecutor of the gentle sister whose birth was hailed as the second blooming of the family tree.

But if those twain were happy in the renewal of their natural affections, what was the warm-hearted artist on finding himself thus hand-in-hand with his former pupil, his generous benefactor! What were the two girls, in so unlooked-for a restoration to the intimacy of their better years! What cheerful memories of the past were summoned up between the four! What happy reminiscences of pleasure-parties on the banks of the Neckar, in which Basil was their guest; or fireside evenings during his slow convalescence at Heidelberg.

Above all, how fondly did Basil, hoping to bring a blush of

shame to the cheek of the guilty Esther, revert to a certain summer evening immediately before his departure from Germany, when, on the invitation of the Graf Von Ehrenstein, they had enjoyed together a simple repast of wine and fruits among the ruins of the old Electoral Castle, cheered by a band of Styrian musicians who were sojourning in the town.

But though Esther Verelst perfectly remembered that it was on this occasion she had first become conscious of the womanly nature of her love for Basil, by her reluctance to join in some pastime that brought them too familiarly together,—it was Salome who blushed,—Salome who so rarely heard pronounced the forbidden name of Ehrenstein, and who had not yet learned to hear it with indifference.

Still, neither the momentary sadness of one of the sisters, nor the despair of Basil, at the belief that the thoughts of his companion were straying to the absent San Catalda, prevented that evening,—the first-fruits of a family union brought about by his instrumentality,—from being one of unqualified enjoyment.

"I must not indulge myself often in this way!" exclaimed Basil to himself, shrugging his shoulders as he quitted the house containing so many who were dear to him. Cheered by their happiness, I must not lose sight of the dearest and most unfortunate of mothers. In order to determine on what grounds I am to stand hereafter towards the man whose destinies have been so strangely intermingled with our own, I must hasten to Barlingham, open my heart to her, and ascertain what influence this frankness may exercise in obtaining her confidence in return. Should she have aught to resent beyond what his admission has unfolded,—dear as they all are to me, never will I look upon the face of one of them again. They are now happy. They are now prosperous. They need me not!—It is *I* who am now to be pitied. The care, and trouble, and misery of life are henceforward for me and Barlingham. I can have no further anxiety for the fate of the future Duchess of San Catalda, or the pampered relatives and guests of A. O.

CHAPTER XXII.

The stately ships go by
To their haven under the hill,
But oh! for the touch of a vanish'd hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still.
Break—break—break,
On thy cold grey stones, oh sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me!

TENNYSON.

At the present season of the year, Basil had little difficulty in obtaining leave of absence for his purposed visit to his mother. His brother officers were now as eager to be in London as, three months before, they had been to get out of it, to Melton; and at the close of a few days, he set out for Barlingham.

It was through the twilight of a glorious evening in May, that he *now* traversed the fields, a glorious evening, fragrant with the breath of hawthorns; the springy, thymy herbage buoyant beneath his feet, and the woodlands quivering with that tender foliage of early spring, whose beauty is as of an hour's duration.

On reaching the small platform in which the surly old mansion stood isolated, his heart sunk within him. The dread of his mother's mournful voice and aspect overpowered his spirits. The embarrassment, the chill invariably benumbing his feelings in the only spot on earth where he was entitled to feel at ease, exercised their usual distressing spell upon his heart.

On entering the sitting-room, he found Lady Annesley seated in her high-backed ebony chair, at her writing-table beside the open casement, enjoying, in solitary meditation, the balmy sweetness of that delicious night. The dews were rising, the birds at rest. All was stillness, holiness, and peace. But though she must have seen him traverse the little bridge across the moat in order to reach the old portal, she had not stirred a step to greet her son. Nevertheless Basil flattered himself that he discerned in her countenance tokens of more than ordinary good will.

"You are welcome, my dear child!" was as much from the lips of that austere recluse, as more impassioned caresses from a more demonstrative parent.

It was always difficult to enter into conversation with one who took so little interest in worldly events, or the frivolities with which ordinary women are amusable. Anecdotes of the day, accounts of a new opera or forthcoming ballet, a brilliant debate or the last new novel, elicited from *her* a listless monosyllable—nay, sometimes the most reproving severity of countenance. On the present occasion, to his surprise, she was the first to question him concerning the dissipations of London.

"With whom have you been living lately?" said she, in a cheerful voice. "The breaking up of the establishment at Rochester House must have been a loss to you,—frequenting it as you did. The Maitlands, too, I find, are about to quit London. You used to speak of their society as a resource. How will you be able to part with the pretty fair-haired Lucy, who is said to regard you with such partiality?"

"The Maitlands were apt to regard with partiality any disengaged young man disposed to trifle away his time at their house," replied Basil, becoming grave in his turn.

"Knowing which, you should have been on your guard against any entanglement of the poor girl's affections," retorted his mother. "In such matters, a woman's peace of mind is the last thing considered; though, Heaven knows, no holier trust is confided to man by the hands of his Maker, than the happiness and well-being of his apportioned partner."

"I heartly agree with you!" cried her son; "and should hate myself were I capable of dealing lightly with any woman to whom I believed myself an object of genuine attachment. Lucy Maitland, on the contrary, has trifled with *me;* since, while indulging in what London calls flirtation, she was prepared to accept the first elder son, with good prospects, who came in her way."

"And yet," resumed Lady Annesley, "I was assured, in a letter I this day received from London, that your affections were irrevocably engaged. You have a right to look surprised, Basil. Few indeed are my London correspondents; and of those, none occupy my attention with idle gossip. I will not keep you in uneasy suspense, however. It was Vardyn, my solicitor, who (in answer to certain instructions I sent him concerning a new codicil to my will, necessitated by the decease of poor Nicholas,) apprised me that he had good reason for believing my son to be on the eve of an advantageous matrimonial connexion with a young lady for whom he had long entertained an attachment. Some one, you see, has been imposing on the credulity of poor Vardyn. For he is incapable of the liberty of inventing a report of any kind concerning you; least of all one calculated to pain me, with the belief that my child had formed engagements of so serious a nature, without consulting the parent whose life has been devoted to his interest."

"Believe me, dearest mother," cried Basil, "that had I entertained in the remotest degree the projects which Mr. Vardyn's officiousness imputes to me, you would have been the first to be apprised. My intimacy with the Maitlands was never concealed from you."

"But you assure me that to *them* the report could not possibly attach?"

"*Certainly* not. Their father is a ruined man. A match with Lucy Maitland would have been as imprudent in a pecuniary point of view, as unadvisable in any other."

"The allusion, then, decidedly regards some lady with whose name I am unfamiliar," resumed Lady Annesley, with *hauteur*. "Far be it from me, Basil, to force myself on your secrets. But I am getting weary of mysteries. As we approach the grave, Basil, the claims of those we love to our entire confidence, acquire stronger force. A few short years, and all that can be known of any of us, must be known to all. To what purpose, then, the petty disguises and hypocrisies with which, through life, we conceal them from each other?"

Basil Annesley was more amazed to hear such a sentence escape his mother's lips than by all her previous amenity. It seemed as if aware of the purpose of his visit to Barlingham, she were affording him encouragement to open his heart.

"I am in some degree aware," said he, with sudden strength of resolution, "that recent circumstances,—that circumstances in which I have been involuntarily concerned,—have given rise to a general belief of my attachment. To make you the confidante of my feelings on this occasion, dearest mother, was needless. For the young lady whom your solicitor describes as an heiress and the future wife of your son, is in fact engaged to another;—another far richer and more important than a poor lieutenant in the Guards."

"You are unhappy, then," exclaimed Lady Annesley, her features relaxing into sympathy. "Basil,—my child,—my dear child—why have you not unfolded your troubles to your mother?"

"My mother has, I fear, experienced too many of her own to

leave me an excuse for aggravating her cares!" replied young Annesley, deeply touched by this unexpected conciliation. "Some day or other, when the wound is less recent, I will tell you, mother, the story of my hopes and disappointments."

"That any living woman should have preferred rank and fortune to the attachment of such a heart as *his!*" burst involuntarily from the lips of Lady Annesley, as she contemplated the fine person and intelligent countenance of her son.

"My dearest mother," whispered Basil, gently taking her hand, "you would forgive *her* and cease to pity *me*, if you knew all. Had my attachment been rewarded by the love I sometimes feel that it deserved, had I indeed obtained the promise of her hand, your consent to our marriage would never, *never* have been granted!"

"Alas! my dear Basil," replied Lady Annesley, "your supposition comprehends a world of accusation against your mother. Great indeed must be your mistrust of my tenderness, since you can conceive me capable of opposing *any* marriage likely to secure your happiness. But harsh and severe, as I may at some moments have appeared,—no scruples of worldly pride would have determined me to withhold my sanction to a match where your affections were engaged. Vardyn described the object of your love as accomplished, amiable, affluent, all that I could desire in a daughter-in-law."

"There are prejudices which neither pecuniary nor personal advantages might enable you to surmount," rejoined her son, anxiously.

"As regards mere worldly distinctions," replied Lady Annesley, with a bitter smile, "I have long ceased to put my trust in coronets."

"There exist many social degrees below nobility," observed Basil, in a faltering voice. "Were the object of my affections, for instance, of *Jewish* origin?"

"Even *then*," interrupted Lady Annesley, "if by faith and profession a Christian, I should not presume to raise objections. Listen to me, my son," continued she, in a voice whose subdued mildness was as balm to the ears of Basil.—"Even such a prejudice as that to which you allude proved the means of disuniting your unhappy mother from the object of her earliest love: nor has a long life of affliction sufficed to expiate my weakness, in suffering myself to be torn from his affections, and bestowed upon an honourable man, to whom I dared to give my hand, while my heart remained pledged to another. Oh, Basil, Basil! of what faults, what crimes, has not that weakness been the origin!"

The breath of young Annesley grew shorter and shorter with agitation. But he had too deliberately provoked this terrible explanation to shrink from the crisis.

"In my own family," resumed Lady Annesley, in a low but firm voice, "this cruel prejudice produced fatal results. The heir of my father's house, my infirm but beloved brother, fell the victim of a struggle arising from the intrusion of my affianced lover under his father's roof. But nobler victims were yet to be sacrificed.

The object of my early affection was a man of honour and virtue. Alas! the disappointments, the humiliations, the slanders to which he was subjected by the pride of my family, reversed his very nature, and converted the energetic youth, burning to devote his talents to the service of his country, into a vindictive and malignant profligate. Driven from England by the tidings of my enforced marriage, he became a wanderer in the East, hopeless, lawless, reckless; and, on his return to Europe, laden with the spoils of his prodigious opulence, converted them into means of evil and vengeance. The family of my unfortunate sister, to whose interference and influence he attributed my union with your father, was ruined by his instrumentality: for a dissolute sensualist now replaced the accomplished scholar,—the gentle friend,—the aspiring philanthropist. And yet, Basil, this corrupt and selfish egotist not only presumed to entertain hopes of rekindling the affection effaced from my heart by the ties of conjugal and maternal affection, but those who should have judged me better, the husband to whom I had been a true and submissive wife, the family which had witnessed my unswerving career of wifelike devotion, dared to believe that my heart reverted repiningly to the object of its first attachment."

The indignation flashing in the fine eyes of Lady Annesley could scarcely fail to provoke corresponding glances in those of her son.

"Admit that I was most unhappy!" cried she, encouraged by this sympathy. "Thwarted in my early hopes of happiness,—embittered in heart and soul on the threshold of life,—yet having derived fortitude from my sense of duty to embrace with ardour my appointed destiny,—I was once more smitten to the very heart's core by finding myself an object of suspicion. Basil! I was again about to become a mother—*your* mother, my darling son;—when some cruel enemy poisoned your father's heart against me by the most groundless accusations. Persuaded that a visit I had made to Paris in behalf of my unfortunate sister was a mere pretext for rejoining the once loved being who, at that period, under an assumed name, was outraging, by his vices, all the decencies of society, your unfortunate father denounced me to his family; loaded me with insult and cruelty; then, as if only the more terribly to attest the justice of his accusation, applied for a perilous command in the Peninsula, and died at the head of his regiment; leaving his widow disgraced and his orphan son tacitly disowned. Thus, Basil, *thus* were you born to me—in tears and misery,—an outcast,—a child of shame and remorse; but, as the Almighty hears and judges me, the child of an irreproachable mother!"

Already, Basil was at his mother's feet, with her hands clasped between his own, and pressed alternately to his quivering lips and tearful eyes. For many minutes, all he could utter consisted in incoherent tributes of affection to that injured woman, and curses against those whose calumnies had proved so fatally triumphant.

"It was not for me to cherish resentful feelings against him who had so cruelly expiated his mistrust," faltered Lady Annesley, in reply to the indignant ejaculations of her son. "The tortures your unfortunate father must have suffered in the belief of my worth-

lessness, sufficiently atoned for mine. Nor was I blameless, Basil, though innocent of this great offence; for I had married him to escape from an unhappy home,—without affection,—my heart still yearning for another. When first Sir Bernard Annesley burst into his furious and frantic accusations, this consciousness so weighed upon my soul as to prevent my replying to his injurious imputations with the open and fearless self-possession of innocence. I knew myself guilty of a fault, though not of the crime attributed to me by the father of my children."

"It was on these grounds, then, dearest mother," said Basil, anxiously "that the Annesleys had the audacity to remove my sister from your protection?"

"They did their duty. Such were the last injunctions of your father!"

"But, surely, the distress into which they saw you plunged at his death, might have served to satisfy them of your innocence?"

"How were they to distinguish between tears of wounded affection and tears of remorse? If the eye of a husband had been so deceived in his estimate of my feelings, what had I to expect from *them?* They had never loved me. Suspecting, in the first instance, the reluctance with which I had given my hand to Sir Bernard, they had not sufficient greatness of mind to estimate the deep and anxious devotion by which that fault had been redeemed. They still saw in me the sullen daughter of Lord L——, arming myself by the protection of an honourable husband against the resentment of others. Their duty to the dead was consequently harshly and rigidly performed. In the first agony of my widowhood, my girl was taken from me. I remonstrated, and was loaded with scornful reproaches. Ah! Basil! Basil!—little can you imagine the bitterness of the tears that fell upon your infant face,—your first sad baptism into the sorrows of human life."

"I can indeed imagine all you must have suffered, my precious mother!" cried he, encircling her with his arms. "Yet let me also dare to hope, that in those early days of affliction your son became your solace? It was for me you lived through your troubles? Yes, it *must* have been for me you lived; for what remained to you but the helpless infant clinging to your bosom?"

"I did indeed love you tenderly," replied Lady Annesley,—tears of affection stealing for once unrepressed down her pale cheeks. "I loved you as a victim, I loved you as a comfort, I loved you as my companion in misfortune. They had torn my first-born from my arms. I knew that my poor Helen was to be reared among those who would consider it a duty to inspire her with coldness and contempt towards her father's widow. But my babe,—my nursling,—my hopeful boy still remained; and at length I learned to be almost grateful for the stigma cast upon him by his dying father, as the means of securing him through life to his mother's embraces. By day, by night, you never quitted my arms. Does your memory carry you back so far, my son, as those days when we were never an hour apart?"

"I remember," faltered Basil, scarcely daring to lift his eyes to

his mother's face, "a sudden change—an inexplicable change. It seemed to have become an object almost of loathing in your sight."—

"Alas! my son," replied Lady Annesley, "my passionate affection had proved the means of confirming the unjust suspicions of the Annesleys. Contrasting the submission with which, in my consciousness of helplessness, I had reconciled myself to their assumption of authority over my girl, with my almost frantic fondness for the poor infant, the only object left for me to love,—they chose to impute this supposed preference to my love for the father, revived in the person of the child! In my first interview with the brother of Sir Bernard, on hazarding an appeal to his feelings in behalf of the helpless nephew so shamefully disowned, in whose infant features those of his brother were already developed, he sternly bade me beware of outraging the memory of the dead! 'To this wretched child,' said he, 'the law forces us to concede the name of my brother. But presume not, Madam, to provoke by further hypocrisy, an exposure of the truth. Let it suffice to the offspring of your shame, that his mother lavishes on his head the affection she does not even pretend to profess for her legitimate daughter. The indignant family of the gallant man whom your wantonness has precipitated into the grave, is neither to be deceived nor insulted. Nay, more; though, so long as you refrain from public interference with our plans for your daughter's education and happiness, the interests of Helen will be cared for, the moment you abandon the decent retreat into which your remorse has betaken itself, and appear before the world as the virtuous widow of Sir Bernard Annesley, all shall be disclosed; and, by the terms of my brother's will, his fortune forfeited to a public charity.'"

"What insolent tyranny,—what shameful injustice!" cried Basil, starting up and pacing the room. "For *his* sake, lucky that my uncle is in his grave!"

"I believed, and believe him to have been actuated by a sense of justice, to the memory of an injured brother," was Lady Annesley's mild reply, "and for Helen's sake I submitted. The dowry, of which Sir Bernard was unable to deprive me, and which, in virtue of the fortune he had received with me, from my father, I felt entitled to accept, was regularly paid me by the executors; and has sufficed, by careful economy, for your education and support. All the concession I ever claimed at their hands, was an occasional interview with Helen. But to what purpose? At every fresh meeting I found her little heart growing colder and colder towards me. By degrees, her embraces became formal,—at length, reluctant. I saw that the affections of my child were alienated for ever; and from that moment, so bitter has it been to me to meet her cold contemptuous eyes, that from the period of her marriage I have ceased to claim from her the outward ceremonies of filial duty. Children have been born to her, Basil, whom I have never held in my arms; children in whose veins my blood, and yours, and your misjudging father's is flowing; yet who will never be more to *us* than the children of the stranger."

"But this must not be!" cried Basil. "Now that I can judge

the full extent of injustice and persecution to which my beloved mother has been subjected, I will no longer endure the contumely heaped upon us both. Be it mine to assert your innocence to these scandalous accusers. Be it mine to assert the unspotted honour of my mother!"

"Alas! my dearest Basil!" cried Lady Annesley, "who will believe you? Interested as you are in the attestation, and without means of proof, the attempt would only draw upon you the contempt and persecution of those who have hitherto restrained themselves within bounds of moderation. The Annesleys have left me unmolested to the happy task of presiding over your welfare,—I have never complained. I am content.—Be submissive and contented in your turn!"

"Contented, so long as I know there exists a human being who has dared to vilify my mother?" exclaimed Basil, with generous indignation. "No, no!—they shall retract their accusations.—They shall replace you in your becoming station.—They shall seek your pardon in contrition and self-abasement—"

"My poor boy!" interrupted Lady Annesley, with a melancholy smile, "I was in hopes the rough schooling of the world had moderated your enthusiasm. *How* are you to achieve all this? By what influence, by what authority?"

"By the influence of truth!—The cause of the just—"

"The cause of the just!" interrupted his mother, "has been for the last five-and-twenty years, a lost cause. If the agony of my soul, when emerging in my widow's weeds from the great peril of childbirth, I swore upon my bended knees that I was falsely accused, failed to convince these obdurate people, what chance that your partial and unsupported pleadings will be more successful?"

"Heavily shall that man account to me, were he even my sister's husband, who persists in his incredulity!" was young Annesley's stern reply.

"God forbid, that I should owe my disculpation to deeds of violence!" retorted Lady Annesley, with equal resolution. "Already this unhappy cause has been the means of spilling human blood. Let it sink in the ground and be forgotten, as I shall soon be in my turn. My father, brother, sisters, even poor Nicholas, has departed. May a succeeding generation be happier, and wiser, and more blest in the propitiating mercy of Heaven!"

"So long as you live, mother, the act of exculpation remains a duty!" exclaimed Basil, for once presuming to resist the authority of his mother.

"Exonerated in *your* eyes, I am satisfied," replied Lady Annesley. "The load of opprobrium under which I have struggled through my latter days I accept as an act of expiation towards the memory of that noble soldier, of whose services I was the innocent means of depriving his country. In his grave be buried all remembrance of my griefs. Even to *you*, my only son, I am perhaps unjustifiable in exposing them!"

"Dearest mother,—your sorrows had already received the tribute of my tears," murmured Basil, again pressing her hands within his own.—"Already had I heard the tale of that ill-fated

attachment; already sojourned with you among the fragrant gardens of Cadiz; already shared your noble resentment when insulted at the Château de Clerval!"

"You know all, then!" cried Lady Annesley, starting from her seat. "Thank Heaven, at least, that though thus mysteriously forestalled in my disclosures, it has not been by the tongue of an enemy. Had you believed me guilty, my own Basil, you would not be by my side."

"I know you to be all that is best and noblest in human nature!" cried her son,—"and will bear witness to it in the face of the assembled world. It was from *him*, mother, I learned the history of your wrongs and misfortunes. It was from *his* lips that—"

"My son," interrupted Lady Annesley, her lips quivering with emotion—"you deceive yourself, or would deceive me. You were yet a child when that unfortunate man atoned his faults and follies, by an honourable death! Like your father, Basil, though in a cause less sanctioned, he fell on the field of battle. Enrolled in the imperial army as a volunteer, he perished on the plains of Austerlitz. This—this is all the trace that remains of him on earth!"—she continued, taking from the desk the miniature which, on a former occasion, had excited such agitating surmises in the mind of her son. "Look upon this face, Basil!—examine the lineaments of this noble countenance, and own that it excuses the early tenderness of your mother!"

"As a pretext for averting his eyes from her own, young Annesley gazed for some moments in silence upon the picture; deliberating in what terms to attempt the startling explanations, more than ever indispensable.

"After the warm interest you have avowed in the original of this portrait," said he, in a faltering voice, and without daring to lift his eyes to the face of his mother,—"I scarcely know in what words to reiterate my assurance that he lives; that only yesterday my hand was enclasped in his, warm with the throbbing pulses of life and health. He has been,—he is,—my friend,—my guide—my benefactor. It was from the confessions of Osalez I learnt to appreciate all the greatness and goodness of my mother. Next to yourself, he is the person who has exercised most influence over the mind and fortunes of your son."

Lady Annesley clasped her hands together in breathless emotion.

"Do not deceive me, Basil!" cried she. "This suspense is perhaps a greater trial than I can bear. Let me hear those words again. He *lives*, you say;—he has been your friend?—"

"He lives. He is prosperous,—generous,—powerful. His crimes have been bitterly repented, cruelly atoned. Sad as has been your seclusion, mother, the expiations of Osalez have been those of a voluntary martyr. Till he became acquainted with your son, and in affection for *him* re-opened his heart anew to the charities of life, his existence was that of the most miserable of mankind. It is only now that—"

The words were suspended on the lips of Basil Annesley, for he saw that they were uttered in vain. Another moment, and he was hanging in anxious terror over the body of his insensible mother.

CHAPTER XXIII.

I may not count my sunny days of youth,—
Their brightness dazzles me! Easier the task
To number o'er those cheerless years, whereon
The drizzling rain of sorrow, falling ever,
Made a perpetual atmosphere of clouds,
Worthy the wretch I am!

MASSINGER.

SLOW and painful was the struggle of returning life to that long-suffering woman, who had borne the heavy hand of sorrow with more fortitude than she evinced under the reviving touch of comfort and affection. It was in vain that, when gradually satisfied of the accuracy of Basil's strange revelations, she attempted to lessen the force of her previous admissions; and right thankful was her son that the secrets of her heart had been fully developed before the startling fact of Osalez's survival imposed discretion on her lips. Basil now knew all. He knew the worst; and that worst imposed no insuperable enmity between Lady Annesley and the lover of her youth.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed he, in the joy of his heart, "I am able to reconcile my duty to my unfortunate mother with grateful affection towards the family I have adopted as my own. In obtaining justice from my father's representatives, I may also arm myself with the influence and strength of one, whose evidence none will gainsay. Osalez is generous. He will not withhold his aid in substantiating the innocence of the woman over whose happiness he has exercised influence so injurious."

On pretence of professional duty, but in reality with the view of hastening to re-kindle in his sister's heart a sense of duty towards their injured mother, Basil Annesley, after another day at Barlingham spent in confidences serving only to enhance their mutual affection, hurried back to town. He was eager for a further conference with Osalez; eager for new explanations with Mrs. Verelst, of whom it had delighted him to hear his mother talk with interest and affection, as little Rachael, the joy of her father's house, at the happy period when the family of Lord L—— were the guests of the elder Osalez.

But on reaching London, he found that the lapse of those few short days had sufficed for the creation of new disquietudes. Almost with the celerity and mystery attendant upon the former disappearances of A. O., the little family was once more dispersed. At the earnest invitation of the Marquis of ——, Mrs. Verelst and Salome had consented, it appeared, to accompany the artist in his expedition to the North; and during their absence, Esther was to remain domesticated with the Branzinis.

"The young lady could scarcely have remained here alone, sir," observed the confidential butler, in Bernard-street, on noticing the mortified air of Annesley; "for my master, as you are probably aware, has quitted England."

"Quitted England? Mr. Osalez quitted England?" exclaimed

Basil, irritated out of all patience by a measure which he was disposed to regard as the result of one of the mysterious caprices of A O., "And whither is he gone, pray?—To Spain?—To Rome?"

"You will learn, sir, at his house of business in the City, to which he has ordered his letters addressed for transmission to the Continent. I rather suspect, sir, from what I heard from one of Lord Maitland's discharged servants, that Mr. Osalez has proceeded to Germany."

"To Germany!—Lord Maitland!" again reiterated Basil; and connecting in his mind the recent insinuations of his mother, concerning his attachment to Lucy, with the former banterings of Abednego on the same subject, he turned from the door, in inexpressible terror, lest the mistaken kindness of Osalez should prompt him to an uncalled-for interference on his behalf with the Maitland family.

"In the kindliness of his heart, he may, perhaps, set about compensating my disappointment of the affections of his niece by procuring me a wife to whom he intends to supply the fortune vaunted by my mother's solicitor! More than once has he alluded to Lucy Maitland's sentiments in my favour; nay, if I mistake not, such was his pretext for the indulgence shown towards her parents, and for which John Maitland openly and unreservedly thanked me. How, how shall I escape, without harshness or discourtesy, an alliance for which Osalez will probably have foreseen and removed every difficulty! I tremble to think of the officiousness of this too active friend!"

It was no great sacrifice to young Annesley to proceed to Mr. Osalez's house of business, in order to ascertain the route taken by the traveller. But the information he obtained was far from definite. Osalez had left London in the Antwerp steamer. His letters were to be addressed to Frankfort-on-the-Maine. The duration of his absence was uncertain; and it was supposed that his ultimate destination might be Vienna.

Could Basil have ascertained the exact whereabout of the man of whose mysterious ubiquity he had already obtained such bewildering experience, he would probably have set forth in frustration of projects which were, perhaps, after all, but the coinage of his own excited imagination. But, as so Quixotic an expedition was, for the present, out of the question, he contented himself with obtaining the address of the Frankfort banker to whose care the letters of Osalez were to be addressed, with the intention of explaining himself by readier and more certain means.

On taking up the pen for this purpose, however, so slight were his adducible grounds for the conjectures by which he had suffered himself to be disturbed, that he had not courage to allude to the subject. To decline a wife and fortune which no one might have entertained the least idea of offering to his acceptance, would afford an endless source of raillery to his sarcastic friend; and in addressing himself to Osalez, his puerile and selfish anxieties speedily gave way before the influence of those more important interests connected with the fatal name of A. O.

To describe his recent interview with his mother, to avow, with

the utmost minuteness, the painful explanations which had ensued between them, and implore, with earnestness, the assistance of Osalez in clearing her injured reputation in the eyes of the Annesley family, and, above all, in those of his alienated sister, became his first duty; and after having enlarged, in eloquent terms, upon the sufferings and sorrows of the injured recluse of Barlingham Grange, and despatched the letter according to the directions he had received, the mind of Basil Annesley became comparatively tranquil. Had he, instead of indulging in chimerical surmises concerning the journey of his friend, fulfilled the expectations of Abednego by proceeding to the house of the Branzinis immediately on learning the dispersion of the family, all had been already explained. Osalez had left no letter for him, simply because convinced that his first object would be a visit to Esther, from whom he would hear the determination of her uncle to exert his interest for the reversal of the decree of banishment issued on an accusation of political offences against the imprudent Verelst.

To his favourite niece, Osalez had confided his projects. Apprehensive of startling the harassed nerves of his sister, or exciting the too sanguine expectations of his brother-in-law, to *them* he had disclosed nothing. But Esther, who already assumed an almost matronly dignity in his eyes, was aware of his earnest desire to complete the happiness of the little family by the union of Salome with the young Count von Ehrenstein, and the gift of a dowry calculated to efface all inequalities of birth. Previous, however, to opening the negotiation, it was necessary to remove the civic disabilities of her father; and his object in visiting Frankfort was to secure, in favour of Verelst, the intercession of various foreign ministers in the free city, whom the importance of his financial position had placed in his interest.

Accustomed to study the mountebankeries of human, or rather conventional nature, Abednego was not a little amused at hearing certain of these plenipotentiaries express their regret that he should have taxed their devotion at so low a rate as to require their intercession in favour of so obscure an individual,—a wretched artist,—of no more consequence in the scale of creation, or the eyes of the Hessian government, than one of the lackeys of their establishment; so little were they capable of surmising, in a half-starved drawing-master of the University of Heidelberg, the brother-in-law of the potent and influential Osalez, whose name was the support of their loans. Their ignorance was, however, ninety to one in his favour. For, had they been conscious of the nature of his interest in favour of the political delinquent, the importance of their interference would have been of proportionate magnitude. So little, indeed, did he insist upon the cancelment of the decree of banishment issued against the poor artist, that within a week it was placed in his hands; in exchange for a deed of indemnification, by which Osalez became responsible for the offender in the paltry sum of ten thousand florins, which would probably have been quintupled by the Hessian government, had his Grand Ducal High Transparency been aware of the relative position of the parties.

To despatch to his beloved Esther immediate tidings of her

father's restoration to his rights was the first impulse of Osalez. But it occurred to him that his mission was only half accomplished; and that the good news would come with a far better grace, if accompanied with intelligence of his interview with Ehrenstein.

On the young Count, the associate of the artist in all his political delinquencies, the sentence so ruinous to the prospects of the poor professor, had fallen innocuous. *He* was not born the subject of the Grand Duchy; and expulsion from the university of Heidelberg in such a cause inflicted no injury on a young nobleman independent in fortunes as in principles.

Save for the displeasure with which his imprudence was visited by a widowed mother, the somewhat severe guardian of his minority, he would have seen nothing to regret in the event; save the interruption of his friendship with his good old master, and *more* than friendship with the lovely fellow-student, whose name he dared no longer even mention in presence of his irritated parent.

In the hope that submission might ultimately propitiate the indignation of the irate dowager, the young Count had in the interim patiently submitted to her caprices, the companion of her summer tours and winter fireside. On the arrival of Osalez at the Schloss von Ehrenstein, he found that the Countess and her son were installed for the summer at the baths of Schlangenbad; and thither he betook himself, not a little amused at being thus accidentally included among the flocks of cockney tourists swarming in the environs of the Rhine.

Years had elapsed since Abednego last visited those beautiful provinces. It was in the van of Napoleon's still victorious army he had last crossed the "exulting and abounding river," then undesecrated by steamboats, and preserving all its majesty of frontier demarcation. Under the influence of navigation companies and advertising hotel speculations, all seemed to have subsided into littleness and vulgarity. The very rocks appeared less majestic, and the river less noble, when viewed as the lions of pleasure-parties and the attractions of contract excursions.

But in the interval which had accomplished those superficial changes, what moral transitions had he not witnessed: the extinction of empires,—the dismemberment of kingdoms,—the annihilation of dynasties,—the downfall of governments. All nations and languages seemed confounded in the memory of Osalez, when he recalled to mind that the Prussia of to-day had been the France of yesterday; that sovereigns now on the throne were at that period wandering exiles; and the sovereigns now wandering in exile, then despots on the throne!

By comparison with such vicissitudes, the changes in his own destinies became of poor account. When he reflected that the mighty army he had seen poured like a torrent on the Rhenish shores, had subsided into nothingness; that, of the great leaders whose names, at that period, kept provinces in awe, many had sunk into a grave already forgotten,—many lived to survive their immortality,—while a few retained possession of their influence over the public mind, only by serving in their old age a cause

which their youth had been devoted to crush and extinguish,—he ceased to wonder at the inconsistencies of his minor career, and began to contemplate with less poignant regret the littleness of the aims and ends to which his great privations, his mighty efforts, had been laboriously directed. Since even potentates were thus baffled, since even states and empires appeared such futile toys and implements in the disposing hands of Providence, since the gifted leader of that triumphant army had been fated to perish a repining captive on a barren rock, what right had Abednego Osalez to repine that the representative of the merchant princes of Cadiz should feel doubtful of having his tarnished riches accepted as the dowry of the last remaining scions of his ill-fated race.

"Yet which among these royal mountebanks," murmured he to himself, as his travelling carriage slowly ascended one of the richly-wooded hills of Nassau, "ever enjoyed as I have done the contemplation of nature, or study of *human* nature? What pleasure or pastime did their regal grandeurs ensure, in which I have not luxuriated with means and appliances far more exquisite? I have commanded the raptures, secure from the pains and penalties of royalty, escaping alike the tedium of a throne and the scorn of dethronement. There was a time when I ambitioned something beyond these finite sensualities. There was a time when I felt within me the germ of a more glorious greatness,—the greatness of mental superiority. But in how many, besides myself, has it perished undeveloped, for want of favourable contingencies? High faculty alone does not suffice for glory; or what names had Bacon and Mirabeau bequeathed to our admiration? Like *them*, I fancied myself born to predominate over the feebler spirits of my contemporaries. Like them, I perceive, in my decline, that moral strength was wanting to fortify those clearer powers of perception on which I vainly prided myself. The world judged truly of me. I was not born to be a great man. It was not my Jewish name that betrayed me,—it was my Jewish nature; it was a secret hankering after the thirty pieces of silver; it was an over mercantile estimate of men and things. So long as I can remember, have I measured every object around me by its weight in gold. I thought myself a match for Lord L.'s daughter, because I was rich. I conceived that I had a right to be listened to in the House of Commons, because I was rich. I fancied myself justified in trampling on the neck of my sister's low-born but high-minded husband, because I was rich. I imagined that I should reconquer the affections of Sir Bernard Annesley's wife, because I was rich. But for this inborn vulgarity of nature, I might have become a great man. When trampled upon, I should have turned upon my oppressors with the generous rage of the lion, not with the subtle venom of the serpent. For though the coil of the boa constrictor may equal the strength of the king of the forest, its triumph is at best only that of an overgrown reptile."

The man who could examine thus searchingly and comment thus sarcastically upon his own condition and motives, was not likely to be more indulgent towards those of other people. Aware

that the Maitlands were sojourning at Wiesbaden, he was careful to inscribe himself in the road-books under the travelling name of Clerval, by which he had been naturalized in France; in order to become an unsuspected spectator of the reformation wrought in the habits of the family by the indulgence and exhortations of A. O.

That the leopard should change his spots or the Ethiopian his skin, was, he knew, as reasonable an expectation as that the China fancier of Arlington-street would renounce the pomps and vanities of life in deference to the exigencies of her position; and it consequently afforded him little surprise when he detected the heartless trifler he had spared, among the most assiduous courtiers of that petty fry of royalty, abounding in every foreign bathing-place, and commanding little reverence, except among the lion-and-unicorn worshippers of Great Britain.

Wherever a royal or serene highness was lodged,—wherever a landgrave or margrave was taking his bath,—wherever a princess or grand-duchess was improving her digestion or complexion, the tall chasseur and showy carriage of Lady Maitland were sure to be seen in waiting; nor could a sprig of royal or imperial dignity spend four-and-twenty hours in the duchy, but, with the vigilance of the police, she managed to detect their arrival, and fasten upon them her officious assiduities. In a place, the sober habits of which secure dispensation from the onerous duties of hospitality, she still persisted in giving dinners. As many, in short, of the costly follies of May Fair as were transportable to the wilds of Nassau, did the idlest of the daughters of vanity continue to cultivate, to the injury of her family and ridicule of her foreign acquaintance.

It needed only the few words of introduction with which Osalez had been furnished by Esther Verelst, to create an intimacy between her uncle and young Ehrenstein; and too happy was the count in this opportunity of obtaining tidings of the family so dear to him, to have leisure for much waste of amazement on finding the girl he had loved in modest obscurity, converted into a wealthy heiress. It was not *that* he cared to learn. All his desire was to know that he was kindly remembered by those he had never forgotten; that his seeming neglects were unvisited by resentment: that Salome was still free to love him, and receive his assurances of undiminished love. Between a nature so frank as his, and a character so decided as that of Osalez, a good understanding was speedily established.

"Yes, I had already heard of you," replied the young count, in answer to the abrupt interrogations of his new friend. "You are not in my eyes, as you may fancy, an ideal personage, like the *oncle d'Amerique* of a French vaudeville. It could scarcely be otherwise. Admitted as I was to the confidence of your family, united with poor Verelst by the bond of a common peril, I could not but hear mention of a certain hard-hearted brother, the monopolist of his family inheritance, who had, however, so memorably abused his monopoly, that heaven blessed not his riches with increase. Poor Verelst fully believed that you had not survived your ruin; but, if still existing, he supposed you to be as necessitous as himself. Under such circumstances he spoke of you with indulgence, and

more than once have I heard your name commended, by the faltering lips of his wife, to the mercy and protection of GOD!"

"They were kinder to me than I deserved," was the candid rejoinder of Abednego.

"Accept, at least, my congratulations that you still survive to become grateful for their moderation," retorted Ehrenstein, more cheerfully. "Allow me even to congratulate *myself* on your resuscitation, rich, conciliating, and indulgent, to remove the only obstacles existing to my perfect happiness in this world. For your openness with me, dear sir, calls for perfect candour in return. The opposition on my mother's part, the dread of which induced me to suspend all advances towards a reunion with the Verelsts during her lifetime, arose rather from their want of fortune than want of connection. My mother, the daughter of a Frankfort banker, has no pretence for demanding from my wife such an addition to the quarterings of the house of Ehrenstein as she failed to furnish. My father's marriage was one of the 'acts of fusion' of the policy of Napoleon; in those days of imperial supremacy when he conferred crowns and wives on dukes and barons, as carelessly as he mediatized princes, or decimated provinces."

"I might have guessed as much from her hauteur," murmured Abednego, half aside. "Never did I find a woman of illustrious descent vain of her social distinctions."

"You say truly," replied young Ehrenstein, overhearing him. "It is one of the inherent evils of what are termed *mésalliances*, that they engender a false position, equally sure to create moral discords. Blessed, however, on this occasion, be the despotism of the emperor, since it entitles me to demand the consent of my mother to a marriage which, through *your* liberality, will serve to restore the dignities of our house to a degree of lustre miserably tarnished by the vicissitudes of war, while it renders *me* the happiest of mankind. The proposal had better, however, originate with yourself. Let me only recommend that you treat with the countess as if conferring, an obligation, rather than seeking a concession. In point of fact, the obligation *is* wholly on our side."

On this hint, and armed with the personal introduction of the diplomatic patrons who had already so efficiently served his cause, Osalez hazarded his overtures of alliance to the *guadige Grafinn*, to whose ears the offer of a dowry of five hundred thousand crowns assumed so miraculous a sound, that it needed financial as well as diplomatic guarantee to convince her of the authenticity of the proposition. No longer did she wonder at the exemplary submission with which her son, abandoning his political visions, had contented himself for the last two years with the administration of the Ehrenstein estates, when she found that this propitious alliance had been the ultimate object of his hopes."

All that remained for even the most fastidious and exacting of the family to desire on the occasion, was speedily fulfilled, by a discovery that the generous Osalez had executed a deed of gift to his brother-in-law and his sister's children, of an estate he had for some years past possessed in the Rheingau, intitling them to rank among the landed proprietors of the province; and, on their return to

Germany, occupy a sphere more consonant with the hereditary fortunes of Mrs. Verelst, and the prospects of her prosperity.

"But now that your betrothment is decided, my dear Earnest, what will you do with your pretty English milédis?" inquired the venerable Countess of her son, as she exchanged a friendly pinch of snuff with Monsieur de Clerval, whose prodigious riches rendered him a species of Rübezahl in her eyes.

"Bequeath them to your care for the remainder of the bathing season, my good mother," replied young Ehrenstein. "I fear I can be no further useful to them, since you kindly sanctioned my project of returning to England, to bring you back the best and prettiest of daughters-in-law.

"Pardon me," retorted the shrewd Countess, with a smile, "I do not accept your legacy. *I* have also my duties to discharge. I must hurry back to Ehrenstein, as becomes a thrifty dowager, and set the old house in order, for the reception of its new *châtelaine*."

"In that case you have only to look out for some high-born *chanoinesse*, to take your place in doing the honours of the country to these distinguished strangers," replied her son, scarcely able to repress his delight at the motherly eagerness with which she entered into his prospects of happiness.

"A *chanoinesse*?" retorted the Countess, contemptuously shaking from her withered fingers the remaining grains of Osalez' incomparable Macouba. "My dear son, you are either the most artful or the most ingenuous of your sex, to affect ignorance that even a Margravine or Grand-duchess would forfeit half her attraction in the eyes of these ladies, unless endowed with a marriageable son. Do you suppose that a poor old Countess von Ehrenstein would have attracted Milédi Maitland and her daughters to climb up three steep staircases of the Hotel des Quatre Saisons, day after day, unless the heart and coronet of her son and heir had passed for disengaged?"

"Always those Maitlands!" cried Osalez, shrugging his shoulders. "When will my fair countrywomen cease to degrade themselves by their husband-hunting crusades!"

"It is the fault of your institutions, my good sir," cried the dowager, sententiously; "it is all the fault of your social institutions. In England, you limit your daughters to an inheritance so scandalously mean, that none but rich men can afford to seek them in marriage. Rich men naturally exercise the freedom or caprice of choice; and these poor girls must consequently either remain degraded and broken-spirited, like the merchandise of a slave-market, looked over or over-looked by an ever-varying crowd of purchasers, or hazard rash efforts in their own favour, still more certain to bring down upon them contempt and mischance."

"Unless," cried Osalez, good humouredly, "they possess a rich and idle uncle, disposed to travel by sea and land,—steamboat and railroad, in order to stir up the decaying members of some lukewarm young gentleman's expiring attachment!"

The reply of Ernest von Ehrenstein to this attack was a hearty shake of the hand.

"You must not, however, detain me here longer than the time

necessary to remove a few coats of gamboge from my sallow visage by the ablution of your Brünnen of Nassau," said he; "for I have another task of a similar nature still on my hands, that will probably require more time and exertion than your openness of heart and hand have brought into request."

A speedy departure was accordingly agreed upon. The following week, the Count was to accompany his new relative through Paris back to England; and the dowager proceed homewards, for the joyous task of preparation.

It did not much surprise Osalez that, in the interim, Lady Maitland, on learning from the Gräfinn von Ehrenstein the happy prospects of her son, and that the uncle of the bride—a nabob, a millionnaire, a more than *fermier général*—was residing in their hotel, should dispatch a most flattering invitation to him, under the name of "Monsieur le Marquis de Clerval, etc., etc., etc." For that a man rolling in riches could be *less* than a Marquis, in a century when titles may be had for paying for, was scarcely to be supposed.

It was a tempting occasion for the Democritus of Delahay-street to convict the hypocrisy of a letter addressed to him at his city office the preceeding week by Lady Maitland; describing herself as in anxious attendance on an invalid daughter, to one whom she conceived to be as immovable in London, as a limpet on a rock, or the giants in Guildhall.

"Monsieur le Marquis" accordingly hastened to announce his gratified acceptance, and was careful not only to absent himself from Wiesbaden in the interim, but that the Maitlands should hear of him from the pompous old Countess as dining at Monrepos with the Grand Duke of Nassau, at Amalienbourg with the Grand Duke of Baden,—and, more ennobling than all, at Frankfort with the Grand Duke of Lucreland—Rothschild the Great.

On the day appointed for the portentous dinner, the two dispirited girls were exhorted to look their best in favour of the bachelor Crœsus, and of the Margraf von Twitterstein-Humberg the Prince and Princess Adelberg von Schwinken-Schwanken, and Grand Marshal Prince Gritten-grettenhoff, whom Lady Maitland had invited with the Ehrensteins, to do honour to the stranger.

With the exemplary punctuality of continental habits, the illustrious foreign guests assembled in her ladyship's drawing-room, redolent of *cipre* powder and eau de Lubin, exactly ten minutes before the hour named on the card of invitation; and, as usual on such occasions, these moments of suspense were devoted by the lady of the house to an exposition of the grandeur and consequence of the expected visitor.

The dinner hour struck. Again did the tall chasseur expend an effusion of *eau à parfumer les apartemens*, in an antechamber which a whole Niagara of essences would not have purified from the scent of Dutch tobacco and *soupe aux choux*. But alas! the Marquis de Clerval was still waited for.

At length, when expectation was at its height, and young Ehrenstein, who had some experience of the caustic and whimsical humour of his new relative, began to apprehend some eccentric

retort upon their ostentatious lady hostess, the doors were thrown open, and the attendants of Osalez ostentatiously announced "Monsieur le Marquis de Clerval." With smiling graciousness Lady Maitland instantly rose from her seat to welcome the noble stranger; when to her dismay, in his meanest attire, and with his least engaging demeanour, in glided the object of her terror and detestation—the Money-lender, A. O.!

Too late to countermand the preparations of that luxurious banquet!—too late to suppress the evidences of the renewal of her profligate extravagance!—even the place prepared beside her table for the expected guest must still remain allotted to the being she most dreaded upon earth!

On some occasions tact supplies the place of higher inspirations. No sooner had Lady Maitland recovered herself sufficiently to look her guest in the face, than she saw that whatever his contempt for her hypocrisy, she had nothing to dread from exposure. The laughter lurking in his eyes was not of a malicious nature. He was there simply in answer to her ladyship's ill-advised invitation; and, as her visitor, chose to be accounted one of the most agreeable who had ever figured at her board. To the astonishment of the girls, who saw him for the first time and knew him by description only as a squalid usurer, the stranger rapidly ingratiated himself with all present, as an accomplished gentleman and well-informed man of the world. Few, indeed, had ever enjoyed such opportunities of instruction and experience; and his former brilliant position at Paris, at an epoch when the reascendant greatness of that mighty capital had been a hidden mystery to German and English eyes, enabled him to season his conversation with anecdotes of the highest interest, such as rendered Talleyrand an oracle, and imparted piquancy to the characteristic small-talk of Montrond.

All the honours of the banquet, in short, were for him whom Lady Maitland had heretofore treated as scarcely on a level with the well-liveried helots of her servants' hall.

Before they parted, a single whispered word from her guest sternly inculcated discretion, and promised discretion in return.

"We meet and part, Madam, as strangers," said he. "Such is the condition of my forbearance!"

"I had hoped," replied Lady Maitland, trusting to propitiate him by adroit flattery,—"that I had gained a most agreeable acquaintance—"

"Instead of which, you have lost the last shadow of a friend!" was the grave retort of her departing guest. "From this moment, expect neither favour nor succour from one who has discovered, as the Marquis de Clerval, all the falsehood of your promises to your gratuitous benefactor—A. O."

CHAPTER XXIV.

Having seen our state,
Our palaces, our ladies, and our pomp
Of equipage,—our gardens, and our sports,
And heard our music, are they, simple friend,
As dear to thee as once, and have thy joys
Lost nothing by comparison with ours?
COWPER.

"You do not thank me," cried Osalez, placing his hands affectionately on the shoulders of the Count von Ehrenstein, as they stood together the following week in the brightness of a July meridian, on the deck of a powerful steam-vessel, pushing its way through the sparkling waters of the Thames. "You do not thank me for having procured you one of the finest spectacles in the universe!"

"After the noble shores of our mighty Rhine," replied Ehrenstein, hoping to provoke his pleasant companion into a playful discussion—"you will not surely find much to say in praise of this watery desert? Do you pretend to compare the charm of a few cockney watering-places and citizen's villas with our rocks and castles?"

"My dear Count, I trouble myself as little about your ruined castles as with yonder green-shuttered nutshells," replied Osalez, pulling his travelling-cap close over his eyes, the better to contemplate a noble Indiaman majestically rounding the Nore;—"the spectacle which I am inclined to boast is the vitality of this throbbing artery of our commercial kingdom. Admit that you have seen more shipping in the last half hour than during your whole preceding life! Steam-vessels are scudding past you every minute, such as your Rhenish provinces would stand on tiptoe to contemplate; and as you approach nearer the metropolis, even your German phlegm will probably be moved with amazement at the stir and bustle of this greatest water-way of the world. I, you know, contemplate such matters with a commercial eye; and I swear to you, that an emperor, surrounded by his glittering court, affords not, in *my* estimation, half so majestic a spectacle as reeking, sooty London, begirt by her restless docks and manufacturing suburbs."

Arrived in town, instead of consigning the young Count, whom he was so desirous to impress with the greatness of England, to his dreary residence in Bernard-street,—a quarter of the town as deserted in the month of July, as a city visited by the plague,—he took up his abode in the hotel overlooking London Bridge, to which the everlasting movement and traffic of the river flowing beneath its windows, supplies an animated panorama.

"Here, indeed, you have a monument to be proud of!" exclaimed Ehrenstein, pointing to the noble bridge of granite, which forms so striking a contrast to the miserable wooden causeways traversing the Rhine. "What a busy world,—what life,—what activity! We provincials contemplate Frankfort as a commercial town? yet

it is as the stillness of Herculaneum compared with this perpetual motion and overwhelming population!"

After thus extorting from his young friend a tribute to the impressive greatness of our metropolitan activity, he chose to contrast the busy quays in which his own far-sighted eye took such keen delight, with the aristocratic mansuetude of Hyde Park; and when, at eight o'clock that evening, they sat down to dinner at the Clarendon, Osalez had the satisfaction of hearing from the Count von Ehrenstein as warm a tribute to the charm of that delightful summer promenade, as his patriotism could desire. The greensward beside the glassy Serpentine,—the fine old trees,—the fair and graceful equestrians,—the beauty, breeding, and spirit of the horses,—seemed to have bewildered the young German's imagination. His narrow experience had not conceived it possible that so vast a concourse of high-bred loungers could be gathered together, unmolested by popular intrusion.

"There is something almost chivalrous in such a spectacle!" cried he, with rapture. "It seems to owe its origin to a modernized phase of the same *animus* which, in centuries less polished, created the tournament and tilt."

Basil Annesley, who by the earnest invitation of Osalez, occupied a third seat at their table, smiled at the enthusiasm of his young friend; who, since their parting on the shores of the Neckar, seemed to have lost none of that ardour of spirit which the cares of life had somewhat abated in his own more sober bosom.

The young guardsman forgot that Ehrenstein at that moment beheld all he looked upon through the prismatic illusions of happy love; that to his ear there was music even in the discordant London cries, because on the morrow he was to listen to the voice of Salome; and that if the grassy ride beside the Serpentine excelled in his estimation the shores of the Rhine or the oaken shades of the Prater, it was because he was to set off at daybreak for L—— Castle,—where, at the express invitation of the amiable Marquis, he was to be united to the younger daughter of Verelst.

That the countenance of poor Basil exhibited so gloomy an expression arose, on the other hand, from similar motives. The discontents of his heavy heart rendered it difficult for *him* to praise the climate of a London July, or even do justice to the centaur-like perfection of English horsemanship. He was out of sorts with himself and all the world.

Even to the humorous account given by Osalez of his interview with Lady Maitland, Basil could scarcely accord the tribute of a smile. When he reflected on the absurd notion he had conceived, only a few weeks before, that his friend's expedition to Germany arose from a desire to find him a wife in that indiscreet family, he had not courage to join in the general laugh at her ladyship's expense.

"I can scarcely excuse to my conscience," said Osalez, after a vain attempt to persuade his German nephew, that curious old Port was a desirable substitute for Asmannhäuser, "having deprived those painstaking misses of their destined prey. Do not flatter yourself, Basil, that *you* are the only little fish which has slipped through

their meshes. Know that Ehrenstein, yonder, demure as he looks, has been deluding the Dowager Colonel's Ariadne into the expectation of becoming a Countess of the Holy Roman Empire; and I only trust he may be able to give as good a colouring to his flirtations, to Salome, as you have managed to do to yours, as regards her sister."

A vivid blush rose to Basil Annesley's temples at this reckless allusion; nor was his embarrassment diminished by perceiving, from certain expressions let fall by his young companion, that Ehrenstein conceived he was to make one of their party to L—— Castle. By way of undeceiving him, Basil hastened to charge him with a message to Verelst.

"But why not tell him all this yourself?" cried the Count, with joyous pleasantry. "I intend to have no leisure for commissions for many days after my arrival. After three years' absence from those one loves, *who* has time to become gossip-bearer to a friend?"

"I suspect poor Verelst will find *as* little, to listen even to the civilities of his favourite pupil," added Osalez. "The reversion of his sentence of banishment, the study and execution of the title-deeds of his new estate, added to the completion of his engagements with Lord L. preparatory to the arrangements for his homeward journey, will probably absorb all his attention."

"Too true?" sighed poor Annesley, in reply. "You will all be too happy to think of your absent friends."

"But I do not understand," cried Ehrenstein, in the warmth of his heart, "why you thus affect to place yourself among the spectators. It has been no small enhancement of the joy of my present prospects, my dear Annesley, to know that they included a friend of so much value, in our circle of happiness. That I was about to hail you as a brother, was one among many delights I know to be awaiting me in London."

"Unhappily, I am less fortunate than you suppose," was Basil Annesley's embarrassed reply.

"Unfortunate—unhappy? What the deuce is all this about?" demanded Osalez, in his turn, satisfied that their conversation, in German, was safe as a despatch-box from the comprehension of the two somewhat boozy members of Parliament, who alone disputed with them possession of the coffee-room. "Your face, my dear Basil, is growing as long as a judge's under his condemning cap. I trusted to find you, on my return, alert and joyous as a lark."

"*I* have not been enjoying a gay tour of the Brunnen of Nassau, to quicken my sense of enjoyment," observed Annesley. "The only excursion from town I have made since we parted, was to Burlingham; and the gloom of my mother's quiet residence was little likely to remove the depression under which I was labouring when we parted."

"But my dear fellow, since then, you have had three weeks to recover yourself and look about you; and, as we left poor Esther in London, for the express purpose of assisting your enlightenment, I was in hopes that, on my return, I should find you upon velvet, with nothing left for the poor old uncle to do, but bestow his blessing

and his money-bags,—if, indeed, you are inclined to complete his happiness by accepting them."

"If *I* am inclined!" burst in a scarcely intelligible cry, from the lips of young Annesley; for he began to fancy himself once more a victim to the inexplicable mockeries of A. O.

"It is then as I feared. Your mother persists in visiting upon that poor child the errors I have so cruelly expiated!" exclaimed Osalez, in a tone of bitterness. "This accounts for my sister's letter of this morning. Rachael assures me that my niece has returned to them, instead of the triumphant creature they hoped to welcome, a broken-hearted invalid! Basil, this is your doing."

"I have not so much as seen Miss Verelst since you left London!" cried Annesley, eagerly.

"Miss Verelst, indeed, and three weeks in town without an interview; yet affect surprise that she should be ill and unhappy. The Branzinis and San Cataldas, who conveyed her to L—— Castle on their way to a tour of the Highlands, insinuated to her mother, their fears that your strange alienation was the origin of her illness."

"The San Cataldas?" reiterated Basil, in his turn. "The *Duke* accuse *me* of coldness towards Esther?"

"Let us conclude that it was his *wife*; for you appear strangely inclined to pick a quarrel, this evening, with any man disposed to find fault with your proceedings."

"The wife of the Duke of San Catalda?" exclaimed Annesley, leaning for support against the back of the chair from which he had arisen.

"You have yet, perhaps, to make acquaintance with the Duchess, who was recovering slowly from her confinement when I left town; and had been too great an invalid throughout the spring to appear at her sister, Madame Branzini's parties."

"The Duke of San Catalda married to the sister of Madame Branzini? Blockhead—madman—that I have been!" cried Basil, with sudden enlightenment; and, on explaining to his friend the error into which he had fallen, Osalez found the mistake so incredible, even with due allowance for the jealous susceptibility of a lover and sullen reserve of the English character, that for some time he still feared Basil must be seeking some plausible apology for his mother's opposition to his marriage with a grandchild of "Osalez the Jew."

The eager entreaties of Basil that he might be permitted to accompany them on their journey the following day eventually modified his opinion; and right gladly did he assent to a proposal which he knew was alone wanting to complete the happiness of the family.

"But what pretence have we for proceeding with so enormous a caravan to the house of a stranger?" inquired the Count von Ehrenstein, with some anxiety.

"We shall soon teach you better notions of English hospitality!" cried Osalez, with a smile "Lord L——, like the best of friends, and most liberal of men, has given me *carte blanche* to make his house my own (or rather Verelst's,) during his absence from Eng-

land. The man with whom you saw me walking and talking in the gardens of the Tuileries, during the half hour that seemed to make you so impatient, t'other day when passing through Paris, was the Marquis of L——. You admired him, if you remember, as a distinguished man. By to-morrow night, you will be able to decide whether the aspect of his castle pleases you as well as that of his person."

By the morrow night, however, Ehrenstein had other thoughts in his head than of castles or marquises; nor were the ideas of Basil Annesley much more disposed for criticism. L—— Castle was Paradise to both.

It is true that, independent of the peculiar charm of the moment, the spot was eminently entitled to be so considered. The stately old mansion, whose venerable antiquity might have appeared too stern unless softened down by the sylvan beauty of the surrounding park, on which revolving springs conferred a perpetual renovation of youth and amenity, compelled the Count von Ehrenstein to admit that England can boast her relics of the feudal ages fully rivalling those of his own country. Even the majestic oaks, which, according to a common Teutonic pretension, he had hitherto deemed peculiar to Germany, and never more glorious than in his own forests at Ehrenstein, amazed him by their Druidical dignity amid the noble scenery of L—— Chase.

You were complaining the other day, my dear Count, as we passed through the Odenwald," cried Osalez, "that the earth was growing bald. What say you to the unrivalled timber of England? Not, I trust, (as the Duke of Rochester once did,) that trees are an excrescence of the earth, provided for the payment of a gentleman's debts of honour. At all events, if you are still disposed to dispute the palm with us for forest scenery, admit that not even the palaces of the Continent exhibit so exquisite a floral triumph as the conservatories of L—— Castle."

"I admit, certainly, that you do your utmost, perforce of stoves and steam, to remedy the defects of a detestable climate, and evince a laudable zeal in bringing from more favoured regions charming substitutes for the thistles and clover which two out of your three kingdoms have appropriately adopted as symbolic of your native Flora! But forgive me for avowing that plants reared with such tremendous outlay of coal and coke, appear, to my imperfect senses, to smell of smoke, instead of emitting the exquisite fragrance peculiar to our German gardens. And now, my dear sir, that I have said my worst, get you gone, like a dear good uncle, and leave us to enjoy the shade of this delicious shrubbery, or, when next you pretend to compare L—— Castle to the Garden of Eden, I may chance to compare you to the spirit of mischief, marring the blessedness of its green retreats."

Fortunately, there were "delicious shrubberies" enough in those widely-spreading gardens to favour solitary walks of more than one happy couple. For it was among the grassy knolls and furzy thickets of the domain, that Basil Annesley found courage to confide to his beloved Esther the jealous pangs he had endured on her account, from the date of her rash engagement at the Opera, to her

intimacy with the family of San Catalda!—how he had loved her,—how he had watched over her,—how he had served her, when hopeless that circumstances would ever bring about the happy crisis which now seemed likely to unite them by indissoluble ties.

They were very happy,—almost *too* happy,—and never weary of recapitulating, chapter by chapter, the story of their mutual love and mutual misunderstanding. It is said that lovers are seldom tired of each other's company, because they talk only of themselves; and certain it is that Osalez was more than once tempted to exclaim against their egotism, when, on addressing himself to either of his nieces, as she leaned on the arm of her dear Basil, or dear Ernest, he was sure to find her pursuing the same train of conversation in which he had last left them absorbed,—reminiscences of past distresses, or anticipation of happiness to come.

On such occasions, however, he had a pleasant retreat for his discontent, in the oriel window of the library, commanding one of the finest vistas of the park;—where sat his quiet, gentle, happy sister,—without a remaining care on earth.

It was to *her* alone Abednego acknowledged his anxiety, lest the answer despatched by Lady Annesley to her son's application for her consent to his marriage, should be less gracious than he desired; and on the day on which her letter was expected at the Castle, Mrs. Verelst noticed, with regret, that the trembling of her brother's hands, while attempting to open the post-bag, rendered it necessary for him to delegate his habitual task to the care of servants.

It was an anxious moment for them all. But it *was* but a moment. Scarcely had young Annesley cast his eyes over the momentous letter, bearing the date of "Barlingham Grange," when he started from his chair, and, rushing to Mrs. Verelst, pressed her cold hands to his lips with such eager impetuosity, ere for the first time he ventured to snatch his beloved Esther to his heart as his affianced wife, that all present recognised in an instant that there existed no obstacle to his happiness.

On the morrow came a letter from Lady Annesley to Mrs. Verelst, addressing her as the beloved Rachael of former days, and talking of the happiness of "their children" in terms consolatory indeed to the hearts of the whole family.

"Surely," observed Ernest von Ehrenstein, as he was spending a confidential hour in the picture-gallery beside the easel of his friend Verelst, who had already made him acquainted with the peculiar mystery uniting the destinies of Osalez and the mother of Basil Annesley,—"surely, since this haughty lady exhibits such early symptoms of relenting, at some future time, she may be brought to realize, in the autumn of life, the hopes untimely blighted in her spring?"

"If I am any judge of human character, I should say *not*," replied the artist. "It is something—nay, *much*—that Lady Annesley has been brought to consent to the marriage of her son. Further concessions are past praying for."

Nevertheless, when Annesley, tearing himself heroically from the midst of perfect happiness, quitted L—— Castle the following

day, announcing a week's absence, Ehrenstein and the two girls felt convinced that the object of his absence was to attempt a complete reconciliation between the persons dearest to him on earth;—the benefactor to whom he was indebted for the noble fortune of his future wife,—the mother, to whom he was indebted for all beside.

But they were mistaken. The mission of Annesley was to his sister. No longer a boy, he sought the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Vernon with the authority of manhood, and the firmness created by a sense of injury; and such was the eloquence derived from these sources, that he succeeded in producing in their minds conviction and repentance.

Now that the uncle, whose prejudices had influenced the youthful feelings of poor Helen against her calumniated mother, was no longer at hand to interpose his vindictive misrepresentations, her ears and heart were opened; and Basil had not only the happiness of being fondly clasped in the arms of his sister, but of proceeding to Barlinghaln, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Vernon, and their children.

The affecting nature of that meeting may readily be conjectured; and the exemplary and long suffering mother felt herself nobly rewarded for her patient years of cloistral loneliness and privation, by the delight of finding her little grandchildren on her knees, and hearing, in the exclamations of all present, spontaneous testimony to the singular resemblance between Helen Vernon's handsome boys and their uncle Basil.

So happy, indeed, were Mr. and Mrs. Vernon in this unexpected extension of their domestic sympathies, that it was agreed they should remain the guests of the gratified Lady Annesley during the preparations for Basil's marriage, which was to take place in London previous to the departure of the Verelsts and Ehrensteins for their native country. Already, Osalez, with proud consciousness of the embarrassment his presence might occasion, had announced his intention of quitting L—— Castle at the same moment with the Count von Ehrenstein and his bride, in order to start for Spain;—a determination approved by the whole family, who felt that overtures for a perfect reconciliation with Lady Annesley would come with a better grace, and to better purpose, at a more remote period.

It was necessary that, in the interim, he should meet Basil in town, for the preparation of those marriage settlements, which conferred five thousand per annum on the husband of his favourite niece, and a charming estate in Berkshire, which would eventually assist in placing him in Parliament.

"You need entertain no scruples of delicacy concerning the *origin* of this property, dear Basil," said Osalez,—justly interpreting the blush that rose to the temples of young Annesley, when he found himself seated with his old friend, for the discussion of business, in the very chamber in which he had witnessed the hateful interview between Lady Winterfield and A. O. "The fortune I inherited from my father, and which I have a right to bestow upon my father's grandchildren, quadrupled the provision I have

been able to make for Esther and Salome; and a more extended acquaintance with the monied world, Basil, will serve to convince you that the foundations of my renovated opulence was laid by Osalez the stockbroker, not by the Money-lender, A. O."

"I rejoice to hear it—I truly rejoice to hear it!" cried Basil, eagerly.

"And since I know you to be somewhat fastidious on certain points," continued Osalez, in a more subdued tone, "do me the favour before you leave this house, to cast your eyes over the ledgers which lie open in the adjoining room for your inspection, and which Zebedee, who is in waiting there, will explain; that you may ascertain from the entries the falsehood of the charges of extortion brought against me by such people as Lady Winterfield, Carrington, Loftus, and Co. Though a Money-lender, I have never been an usurer. The transaction which brought us acquainted, Basil, was but the type of my usual dealings. It was only because, relying on a moderate rate of interest, it became necessary to be doubly cautious concerning the validity of securities, that I obtained the name of a Barabbas."

"I am content to take your extenuation on your own authority," was Annesley's grave reply. "The sight of such documents would be painful to my feelings."

"Well, well,—you shall make a bonfire of them if you will," retorted Osalez; "and the spruce page who ushered you in, (and who looked so grievously disappointed, my dear Basil, that you did not deign to recognise your fellow-labourer Bill, the street-sweeper of Delahay-street,) shall assist in the operations; always with due reverence to the rights of the Phœnix fire-office, and the safety of our neighbours."

Right welcome was the proposal to Basil; and that very day, to the amazement of the impudent clerk, his kingdom, as a money-changer, was taken from him, and the landmarks of its frontier destroyed. A still pleasanter moment, however, awaited Basil Annesley when he joined that day at dinner, in Bernard-street, a circle composed of some of the first mercantile thrones and dominions of the day; and witnessed anew the respect commanded among them by his new relative. With *them*, all the eccentricities of Osalez were laid aside; and Basil was struck with surprise and admiration of the versatility of his nature, while noticing the air of dignified self-possession with which he delivered his political Oracles.

From the personal consideration conceded to himself by these worshippers of the golden calf, Basil readily discerned that he was announced to them as the co-heir of the rich Osalez; and there were moments when the painful knowledge of his family history rendered embarrassing the almost impassioned affection testified towards him by the man who, from the eventful period of his illness in Delahay-street, had really loved him as a son.

As they stood together, side by side, the following week, in the private chapel at L——House, as witnesses to the marriage of the Count von Ehrenstein with the lovely and happy Salome, Basil could not but detect a certain sadness in the countenance of his

old friend, which he justly conjectured to arise from the impossibility of performing a kinsman's duty at the solemnization of his own. To so kindly a heart as that of Basil, it was impossible not to express a participation in this regret; and a wish that he would at least find some other object for his projected journey than a winter at Cadiz.

"It cannot be, my dear boy!" was Abednego's reply. "Do not unman my resolution. Already, I am fifty-fold happier than I deserve. With one exception, all my worldly wishes are accomplished; and but for this single drawback, I should feel myself bound to yet heavier duties of expiation. Surrounded by happy faces and grateful hearts, were I to pretend to the happiness you have in prospect for me, I should perhaps forget, in the pride of my heart and happiness of my family, that I owe peculiar acts of atonement to society for having tarnished by my vindictive spirit and its cruel influence, the honour of an unblemished family. Henceforward, Basil, my joy will be in your prosperity. Though you have renounced your profession, as inauspicious to domestic happiness, you must not become an idle man. The cares of your estate will, for the present, interest your attention. But some years hence, I trust to see you in parliament, realizing the hopes of distinction I was forced to forego. To behold you an honour to your country and a blessing to the best of mothers, will efface from my mind, in my progress to the grave, all the bitterness engendered by the name of Osalez the Jew; all the repentance connected with the hateful calling of the Money-lender!

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